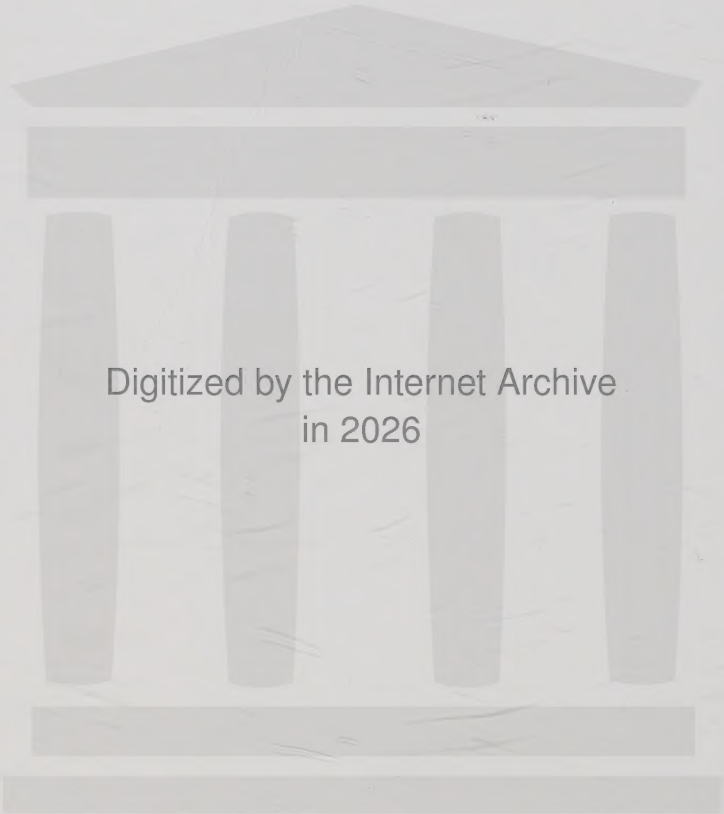
Fighting the Flames

R. M. Ballantyne

WARREN COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 3583 00451 5504


Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/fightingflames0000robe

WITHDRAWN

Fighting the Flames

R. M. Ballantyne

DODO PRESS

"Fighting the Flames"

BY

R.M. Ballantyne

1867

Chapter One.

How the Fight Began.

One's own fireside is, to all well-regulated minds, a pleasant subject of contemplation when one is absent, and a source of deep gratification when present.

Especially may this be said to be the case in a cold, raw night in November, when mankind has a tendency to become chronically cross out of doors, and nature, generally, looks lugubrious; for, just in proportion as the exterior world grows miserably chill, the world "at home," with its blazing gas, its drawn curtains, its crackling fires, and its beaming smiles, becomes doubly comfortable and cosy.

Even James Auberly, pompous, stern, and ungenial though he was, appeared to entertain some such thoughts, as he sat by his own fireside, one such night, in his elegant mansion in Beverly Square, Euston Road, London; and smiled grimly over the top of the *Times* newspaper at the fire.

Mr Auberly always smiled—when he condescended to smile—grimly. He seldom laughed; when he did so he did it grimly too. In fact, he was a grim man altogether; a gaunt, cadaverous, tall, careworn, middle-aged man—also a great one. There could be no question as to that; for, besides being possessed of wealth, which, in the opinion of some minds, constitutes greatness, he was chairman of a railway company, and might have changed situations with the charwoman who attended the head office of the same without much difference being felt. He was also a director of several other companies, which, fortunately for them, did not appear to require much direction in the conduct of their affairs.

Mr Auberly was also leader of the fashion, in his own circle, and an oracle among his own parasites; but, strange to say, he was nobody whatever in any other sphere. Cabmen, it is true, appeared to have an immense respect for him on first acquaintance, for his gold rings and chains bespoke wealth, and he was a man of commanding presence, but their respect never outlived a first engagement. Cabmen seldom touched their hats to Mr Auberly on receiving their fare; they often parted from him with a smile as grim as his own, and

once a peculiarly daring member of the fraternity was heard blandly to request him to step again into the cab, and he would drive him the "nine hundred and ninety-ninth part of an inch that was still doo on the odd sixpence." That generous man even went further, and, when his fare walked away without making a reply, he shouted after him that "if he'd only do 'im the honour to come back, he'd throw in a inch an' a half extra for nothink." But Mr Auberly was inexorable.

"Louisa, dear," said Mr Auberly, recovering from the grim smile which had indicated his appreciation of his own fireside, "pour me out another cup of coffee, and then you had better run away to bed. It is getting late."

"Yes, papa," replied a little dark-eyed, dark-haired girl, laying down her book and jumping up to obey the command.

It may be added that she was also dark-dressed, for Mr Auberly had become a widower and his child motherless only six months before.

While Louisa was pouring out the coffee, her father rose and turned his back to the fire.

It was really interesting, almost awe-inspiring, to behold Mr Auberly rise; he was so very tall, and so exceedingly straight. So remarkably perpendicular was he, so rigidly upright, that a hearty but somewhat rude sea-captain, with whom he once had business transactions, said to his mate on one occasion that he believed Mr Auberly must have been born with a handspike lashed to his backbone. Yes, he was wonderfully upright, and it would have been downright madness to have doubted the uprightness of the spirit which dwelt in such a body; so nobody did doubt it, of course, except a few jaundiced and sceptical folk, who never could be got to believe anything.

"Good-night, my love," said Mr Auberly, as the child placed the coffee beside his chair, and then advanced, somewhat timidly, and held up her cheek to be kissed.

The upright man stooped, and there was a shade less of grimness in his smile as his lips touched his daughter's pale cheek.

Louisa, or, to use the name by which she was better known in the house, Loo, had clasped her hands tightly together while she was in

the act of receiving this tribute of parental affection, as if she were struggling to crush down some feeling, but the feeling, whatever it was, would not be crushed down; it rose up and asserted itself by causing Loo to burst into a passionate flood of tears, throw her arms round her father's neck, and hold him tight there while she kissed his cheek all over.

"Tut, tut, child!" exclaimed Mr Auberly, endeavouring to re-arrange the stiff collar and cravat, which had been sadly disordered; "you must really try to get over these—there, don't be cast down," he added, in a kinder tone, patting Loo's head. "Good-night, dear; run away to bed now, and be a good girl."

Loo smiled faintly through her tears as she looked up at her father, who had again become upright, said "Good-night," and ran from the room with a degree of energy that might have been the result of exuberant spirits, though possibly it was caused by some other feeling.

Mr Auberly sat for some time, dividing his attentions pretty equally between the paper, the fire, and the coffee, until he recollected having received a letter that day which he had forgotten to answer, whereupon he rose and sat down before his writing-table to reply.

The letter was from a poor widow, a sister-in-law of his own, who had disgraced herself for ever—at least in Mr Auberly's eyes—by having married a waterman. Mr Auberly shut his eyes obstinately to the fact that the said waterman had, by the sheer force of intelligence, good conduct, courage, and perseverance, raised himself to the command of an East Indiaman. It is astonishing how firmly some people can shut their eyes—sew them up, as it were, and plaster them over—to some things, and how easily they can open them to others! Mr Auberly's eyes were open only to the fact that his sister-in-law had married a waterman, and that that was an unpardonable sin, for which she was for ever banished from the sunshine of his presence.

The widow's letter set forth that since her husband's death she had been in somewhat poor circumstances—though not in absolute poverty—for which she expressed herself thankful; that she did not write to ask for money, but that she had a young son—a boy of about twelve—whom she was very anxious to get into a mercantile house

of some sort, and, knowing his great influence, etcetera, etcetera, she hoped that, forgetting, if not forgiving, the past, now that her husband was dead, he would kindly do what he could, etcetera, etcetera.

To this Mr Auberly replied that it was impossible to forgive the past, but he would do his best to forget it, and also to procure a situation for her son (though *certainly* not in his own office), on one consideration, namely, that she, the widow, should forget the past also—including his own, Mr Auberly's, existence (as she had once before promised to do), and that she should never inform her son, or any other member of her family—if there happened to be any others members of it—of the relationship existing between them, nor apply to him by visit or by letter for any further favours. In the event of her agreeing to this arrangement, she might send her son to his residence in Beverly Square, on Thursday next, between eleven and twelve.

Just as he concluded this letter a footman entered softly and laid a three-cornered note on the table.

"Stay, Hopkins, I want you," said Mr Auberly, as he opened the note and ran his eye over it.

Hopkins, who was clad in blue velvet and white stockings, stood like a mute beside his master's chair. He was very tall and very thin, and very red in the nose.

"Is the young woman waiting, Hopkins?"

"Yes, sir; she's in the lobby."

"Send her up."

In a few seconds Hopkins reopened the door, and looked down with majestic condescension on a smart young girl whom he ushered into the room.

"That will do; you may go—stay, post this letter. Come here, young woman."

The young woman, who was evidently a respectable servant-girl, approached with some timidity.

"Your name is Matty Merryon, I understand (yes, sir), at least so your late mistress, Miss Tippet, informs me. Pray, what does Matty stand for?"

"Martha, sir."

"Well, Martha, Miss Tippet gives you a very good character—which is well, because I intend you to be servant to my child—her maid; but Miss Tippet qualifies her remarks by saying that you are a little careless in *some* things. What things are you careless in?"

"La! sir—"

"You must not say 'La!' my girl," interrupted Mr Auberly with a frown, "nor use exclamations of any kind in my presence; what are the 'some things' referred to?"

"Sure I don't know, sir," said the abashed Matty. "I s'pose there's a-many things I ain't very good at; but, please, sir, I don't mean to do nothin' wrong, sir, I don't indeed; an' I'll try to serve you well, sir, if it wor only to plaaze my missis, as I'm leavin' against my will, for I love my—"

"There, that will do," said Mr Auberly somewhat sternly, as the girl appeared to be getting excited.

"Ring that bell; now, go downstairs and Hopkins will introduce you to my housekeeper, who will explain your duties to you."

Hopkins entered and solemnly marched Martha Merryon to the regions below.

Mr Auberly locked away his papers, pulled out his watch, wound it up, and then, lighting a bedroom candle, proceeded with much gravity upstairs.

He was a very stately-looking man, and strikingly dignified as he walked upstairs to his bedroom—slowly and deliberately, as though he were marching at his own funeral to the tune of something even deader than the "Dead March in Saul."

It is almost a violation of propriety to *think* of Mr Auberly doing such a very undignified thing as "going to bed!" Yet truth requires us to tell that he did it; that he undressed himself as other mortals do; that he clothed himself in the wonted ghostly garment; and that, when his head was last seen—in the act of closing the curtains around him—there was a conical white cap on it, tied with a string below the chin, and ornamented on the top with a little tassel, which waggled as though it were bidding a triumphant and final adieu to human dignity!

Half an hour later, Mrs Rose, the housekeeper, a matronly, good-looking woman, with very red cheeks, was busy in the study explaining to Matty Merryon her duties. She had already shown her all over the house, and was now at the concluding lesson.

"Look here now, Merryon," began the housekeeper.

"Oh, please don't call me Merryon—I ain't used to it. Call me Matty, *do* now!"

"Very well, Matty," continued Mrs Rose, with a smile, "I've no objection; you Irish are a strange race! Now, look here. This is master's study, and mind, he's very partikler, dreadful partikler."

She paused and looked at her pupil, as if desirous of impressing this point deeply on her memory.

"He don't like his papers or books touched; not even dusted! So you'll be careful not to dust 'em, nor to touch 'em even so much as with your little finger, for he likes to find 'em in the mornin' just as he left 'em at night."

"Yes, Mrs Rose," said Matty, who was evidently giving up her whole soul to the instruction that was being imparted.

"Now," continued the housekeeper, "the arranging of this room will be your last piece of work at night. You'll just come in, rake out the grate, carry off the ashes, lay the noo fire, put the matches handy on the chimney-piece, look round to see that all's right, and then turn off the gas. The master is a early riser, and lights the fire his-self of a mornin'."

"Yes, 'm," said Matty, with a courtesy.

"Now, go and do it," said Mrs Rose, "that I may see you understand it. Begin with the grate an' the ashes."

Matty, who was in truth an experienced maid-of-all-work, began with alacrity to discharge the duties of her new station. She carried off the ashes, and returned with the materials for next day's fire in a shovel. Here she gave a slight indication of her so-called carelessness (awkwardness would have been more appropriate) by letting two or three pieces of stick and a bit of coal fall on the carpet, in her passage across the room.

"Be careful, Matty," said Mrs Rose gently. "It's all owin' to haste. Take your time, an' you won't do such things."

Matty apologised, picked up the materials, and laid the fire. Then she took her apron and approached the writing-table, evidently with the intention of taking the dust off the corners, but not by any means intending to touch the books or papers.

"Stop!" cried Mrs Rose sternly.

Matty stopped with a guilty look.

"Not a touch," said Mrs Rose.

"Not even the edges, nor the legs?" inquired the pupil.

"Neither edges nor legs," said the instructor.

"Sure it could do no harm."

"Matty," said Mrs Rose solemnly, "the great thing that your countrywomen have to learn is *obedience*."

"Thank 'ee, 'm," said Matty, who, being overawed by the housekeeper's solemnity, felt confused, and was uncertain whether the reference to her countrywomen was complimentary or the reverse.

"Now," continued Mrs Rose, "the matches."

Matty placed the box of matches on the chimney-piece.

"Very well; now you've got to look round to see that all's right."

Matty looked round on the dark portraits that covered the walls (supposed to be ancestors), on the shelves of books, great and small, new and old (supposed to be read); on the vases, statuettes, chairs, tables, desks, curtains, papers, etcetera, etcetera, and, being utterly ignorant of what constituted right and what wrong in reference to such things, finally turned her eyes on Mrs Rose with an innocent smile.

"Don't you see that the shutters are neither shut nor barred, Matty?"

She had *not* seen this, but she at once went and closed and barred them, in which operation she learned, first, that the bars refused to receive their respective "catches," with unyielding obstinacy for some time; and, second, that they suddenly gave in without rhyme or reason and pinched her fingers severely.

"Now then, what next?" inquired Mrs Rose.

"Put out the gas," suggested Matty.

"And leave yourself in the dark," said the housekeeper, in a tone of playful irony.

"Ah! sure, didn't I forgit the candle!"

In order to rectify this oversight, Matty laid the unlighted candle which she had brought with her to the room on the writing-table, and going to the chimney-piece, returned with the match-box.

"Be careful now, Matty," said Mrs Rose earnestly. "There's nothink I've such a fear of as fire. You can't be too careful."

This remark made Matty, who was of an anxious temperament, extremely nervous. She struck the match hesitatingly, and lighted the candle shakily. Of course it would not light (candles never do on

such occasions), and a long red-hot end of burnt wood projected from the point of the match.

"Don't let the burnt end drop into the wastepaper basket!" exclaimed Mrs Rose, in an unfortunate moment.

"Where?" exclaimed Matty with a start that sent the red-hot end into the centre of a mass of papers.

"There, just at your feet; don't be so nervous, girl!" cried Mrs Rose.

Matty, in her anxiety not to drop the match, at once dropped it into the waste-paper basket, which was instantly alight. A stamp of the foot might have extinguished it, but this did not occur to either of the domestics. The housekeeper, who was a courageous woman, seized the basket in both hands and rushed with it to the fireplace, thereby fanning the flame into a blaze and endangering her dress and curls. She succeeded, however, in cramming the basket and its contents into the grate; then the two, with the aid of poker, tongs, and shovel, crushed and beat out the fire.

"There! I said you'd do it," gasped Mrs Rose, as she flung herself, panting, into Mr Auberly's easy-chair; "this comes of bein' in a hurry."

"I was always unfort'nit," sighed Matty, still holding the shovel and keeping her eye on the grate, as if ready to make a furious attack on the smallest spark that should venture to show itself.

"Come, now, we'll go to bed," said Mrs Rose, rising, "but first look well round to see that all is safe."

A thorough and most careful investigation was made of the basket, the grate, and the carpet surrounding the fireplace, but nothing beyond the smell of the burnt papers could be discovered, so the instructor and pupil put out the gas, shut the door, and retired to the servants'-hall, where Hopkins, the cook, the housemaid, and a small maid-of-all-work awaited their arrival—supper being already on the table.

Here Mrs Rose entertained the company with a graphic—not to say exaggerated—account of the "small fire" in the study, and wound up

with an eloquent appeal to all to "beware of fire," and an assurance that there was nothing on the face of the whole earth that she had a greater horror of.

Meanwhile the "little spark" among the papers—forgotten in the excitement of the succeeding blaze of the waste-paper basket—continued to do its slow but certain work. Having fallen on the cloth between two bundles, it smouldered until it reached a cotton pen-wiper, which received it rather greedily in its embrace. This pen-wiper lay in contact with some old letters which were dry and tindery in their nature, and, being piled closely together in a heap, afforded enlarged accommodation, for the "spark," which in about half an hour became quite worthy of being termed a "swell."

After that things went on like—"like a house on fire"—if we may venture to use that too often misapplied expression, in reference to the elegant mansion in Beverly Square on that raw November night.

Chapter Two.

Another Little "Spark."

Whistling is a fine, free, manly description of music, which costs little and expresses much.

In all its phases, whistling is an interesting subject of study; whether we regard its aptitude for expressing personal independence, recklessness, and jollity; its antiquity—having begun no doubt with Adam—or its modes of production; as, when created grandly by the whistling gale, or exasperatingly by the locomotive, or gushingly by the lark, or sweetly by the little birds that "warble in the flowering thorn."

The peculiar phase of this time-honoured music to which we wish to draw the reader's attention at present, is that which was exemplified one November night (the same November night of which mention has been made in the previous chapter) by a small boy who, in his progress through the streets of London, was arrested suddenly under the shadow of St. Paul's by the bright glare and the tempting fare of a pastry-cook's window.

Being hungry, the small boy, thrusting his cold hands deep into his empty trouser-pockets, turned his fat little face and round blue eyes full on the window, and stared at the tarts and pies like a famishing owl. Being poor—so poor that he possessed not the smallest coin of the realm—he stared in vain; and, being light of heart as well as stout of limb, he relieved his feelings by whistling at the food with inexpressible energy.

The air selected by the young musician was Jim Crow—a sable melody high in public favour at that time—the familiar strains of which he delivered with shrill and tuneful precision, which intensified as he continued to gaze, until they rose above the din of cabs, vans, and 'busses; above the house-tops, above the walls of the great cathedral, and finally awakened the echoes of its roof, which, coming out, from the crevices and cornices where they usually slept, went dancing upwards on the dome, and played around the golden cross that glimmered like a ghost in the dark wintry sky.

The music also awakened the interest of a tall policeman whose beat that night chanced to be St. Paul's Churchyard. That sedate guardian of the night, observing that the small boy slightly impeded the thoroughfare, sauntered up to him, and just as he reached that point in the chorus where Mr Crow is supposed to wheel and turn himself about, spun him round and gave him a gentle rap on the head with his knuckles, at the same time advising him to move on.

"Oh!" exclaimed the small boy, looking up with an expression of deep concern on his countenance, as he backed off the pavement, "I *hope* I didn't hurt you, bobby; I *really* didn't mean to; but accidents will happen, you know, an' if you won't keep your knuckles out of a feller's way, why—"

"Come," muttered the policeman, "shut up your potato-trap for fear you catch cold. Your mother wants you; she's got some pap ready for you."

"Ha!" exclaimed the small boy, with his head a little on one side, as though he were critically inspecting the portrait of some curious animal, "a prophet it is—a blue-coated prophet in brass buttons, all but choked with a leather stock—if not conceit. A horacle, six fut two in its stockin's. I say, bobby, whoever brought you up carried you up much too high, both in body and notions. Wot *wouldn't* they give for 'im in the Guards, or the hoss-marines, if he was only eight inches wider across the shoulders!"

Seeing that the policeman passed slowly and gravely on without condescending to take further notice of him, the small boy bade him an affectionate farewell; said that he would not forget to mention him favourably at head-quarters, and then continued his progress through the crowded streets at a smart pace, whistling Jim Crow at the top of his shrill pipe.

The small boy had a long walk before him; but neither his limbs, spirits, nor lips grew weary by the way. Indeed, his energies seemed to increase with every step, if one might judge from the easy swagger of his gait, and the various little touches of pleasantry in which he indulged from time to time; such as pulling the caps over the eyes of boys smaller than himself, winking at those who were bigger, uttering Indian war-whoops down alleys and lanes that looked as if they could echo, and chaffing all who appeared to be

worthy of his attentions. Those eccentricities of humour, however, did not divert his active mind from the frequent and earnest study of the industrial arts, as these were exhibited and exemplified in shop-windows.

"Jolly stuff that, ain't it?" observed another small boy, in a coat much too long for him, as they met and stopped in front of a chocolate-shop at the top of Holborn Hill, where a steam-engine was perpetually grinding up such quantities of rich brown chocolate, that it seemed quite unreasonable, selfish, and dog-in-the-manger-ish of the young man behind the counter to stand there, and neither eat it himself, nor let anyone else touch it.

"Yes, it's very jolly stuff," replied the first small boy, regarding his questioner sternly. "I know you'd like some, wouldn't you? Go in now an' buy two pen'orth, and I'll buy the half from you w'en you come out."

"*Walker*!" replied the boy in the long coat.

"Just so; and I'd advise you to become a walker too," retorted the other; "run away now, your master's bin askin' after you for half an hour, *I* know, and more."

Without waiting for a reply, the small boy (our small boy) swaggered away whistling louder than ever.

Passing along Holborn, he continued his way into Oxford Street, where the print-shop windows proved irresistibly attractive. They seemed also to have the effect of stimulating his intellectual and conceptive faculties, insomuch that he struck out several new, and, to himself, highly entertaining pieces of pleasantry, one of which consisted of asking a taciturn cabman, in the meekest of voices:

"Please, sir, you couldn't tell me wot's o'clock, could you?"

The cabman observed a twinkle in the boy's eye; saw through him; in a metaphorical sense, and treated him with silent contempt.

"Oh, I beg pardon, sir," continued the small boy, in the same meek tone, as he turned to move humbly away; "I forgot to remember that

cabbies don't carry no watches, no, nor *change* neither, they're much too wide awake for that!"

A sudden motion of the taciturn cabman caused the small boy to dart suddenly to the other side of the crowded street, where he resumed his easy independent air, and his interrupted tune.

"Can you direct me to Nottin' Hill Gate, missus?" he inquired of an applewoman, on reaching the neighbourhood of Tottenham Court Road.

"Straight on as you go, boy," answered the woman, who was busying herself about her stall.

"Very good indeed," said the small boy, with a patronising air; "quite correctly answered. You've learnt geography, I see."

"What say?" inquired the woman, who was apparently a little deaf.

"I was askin' the price o' your oranges, missus."

"One penny apiece," said the woman, taking up one.

"They ain't biled to make 'em puff out, are they?"

To this the woman vouchsafed no reply.

"Come, missus, don't be cross; wot's the price o' yer apples now?"

"D'you want one?" asked the woman testily.

"Of course I does."

"Well, then, they're two a penny."

"Two a penny!" cried the small boy, with a look of surprise; "why, I'd 'a said they was a penny apiece. Good evenin', missus; I never buys cheap fruit—cheap and nasty—no, no; good evenin'."

It seemed as if the current of the small boy's thoughts had been diverted by this conversation, for he walked for some time with his

eyes cast on the ground, and without whistling, but whatever the feelings were that might have been working in his mind, they were speedily put to flight by a facetious butcher, who pulled his hat over his eyes as he passed him.

"Now then, pig-sticker, what d'ye mean by that?" he shouted, but as the butcher walked on without deigning to reply, he let off his indignation by yelling in at the open door of a tobacco-shop and making off at a brisk run.

From this point in his progress, he became still more hilarious and daring in his freaks, and turned aside once or twice into narrow streets, where sounds of shouting or of music promised him fresh excitement.

On turning the corner of one of those streets, he passed a wide doorway, by the side of which was a knob with the word FIRE in conspicuous letters above it, and the word BELL below it. The small boy paused, caught his breath as if a sudden thought had struck him, and glanced round. The street was comparatively quiet; his heart beat high; he seized the bell with both hands, pulled it full out, and bolted!

Now it chanced that one of the firemen of the station happened to be standing close to the door, inside, at the time. He, guessing the meaning of the ring at once, darted out and gave chase.

The small boy fled on the wings of terror, with his blue eyes starting from their sockets. The fireman was tall and heavy, but he was also strong and in his prime, so that a short run brought him up with the fugitive, whom he seized with a grip of iron.

"Now, then, young bottle-imp, what did you mean by that?"

"Oh! please, sir," gasped the small boy, with a beseeching look, "I *couldn't* help it."

There was such a tone of truthfulness in this "*couldn't*" that it tickled the fireman. His mouth relaxed in a quiet smile, and, releasing his intended victim, he returned to the station, while the small boy darted away in the direction of Oxford Street.

He had scarcely reached the end of the street, however, when a man turned the corner at full speed and ran him down—ran him down so completely that he sent him head-over-heels into the kennel, and, passing on, darted at the fire-bell of the station, which he began to pull violently.

The man was tall and dishevelled, partially clad in blue velvet, with stockings which had once been white, but were now covered from garter to toe with mud. One shoe clung to his left foot, the other was fixed by the heel in a grating over a cellar-window in Tottenham Court Road. Without hat or coat, with his shirt-sleeves torn by those unfortunates into whose arms he had wildly rushed, with his hair streaming backwards, his eyes blood-shot, his face pale as marble, and perspiration running down his cheeks, not even his own most intimate friends would have recognised Hopkins—the staid, softspoken, polite, and gentle Hopkins—had they seen him that night pulling like a maniac at the fire-bell.

And, without doubt, Hopkins *was* a maniac that night—at least he was afflicted with temporary insanity!

Chapter Three.

Fire!!!

"Hallo, that'll do, man!" cried the same stalwart fireman who had seized the small boy, stepping out and laying his hand on Hopkins's shoulder, whereabouts is it?

Hopkins heard him not. One idea had burnt itself into the poor man's brain, and that was the duty that lay on him to ring the alarm-bell! Seeing this, the fireman seized him, and dragged him forcibly—almost lifted him—into the station, round the door of which an eager crowd had already begun to collect.

"Calm yourself," said the stalwart fireman quietly, as he thrust Hopkins down into a chair. "Consider now. You'll make us too late if you don't speak. Where is it?"

"B–B–Fire!" yelled Hopkins, gasping, and glaring round him on the men, who were quietly putting on their helmets.

Hopkins suddenly burst from the grasp of his captor, and, rushing out, seized the bell-handle, which he began to pull more furiously than ever.

"Get her out, Jim," said the fireman in a low tone to one of his comrades ("her" being the engine); at the same time he went to the door, and again seizing Hopkins, brought him back and forced him into a chair, while he said firmly:

"Now, then, out with it, man; where's the fire?"

"Yes, yes," screamed Hopkins, "fire! fire that's it! B–! B–Beverly!—blazes!—square!—number—Fire!"

"That'll do," said the fireman, at once releasing the temporary maniac, and going to a book where he calmly made an entry of the name of the square, the hour of the night, and the nature of the call. Two lines sufficed. Then he rose, put on his helmet, and thrust a small hatchet into his belt, just as the engine was dragged to the door of the station.

There was something absolutely magnificent in this scene which no pen can describe, because more than half its force was conveyed only by the eye and the ear. The strong contrast between human excitement and madness coupled with imbecility, and human calmness and self-possession coupled with vigorous promptitude, was perfect.

Just before poor Hopkins rang his first note of alarm the station had been wrapt in profound silence—the small boy's interruption having been but a momentary affair. George Dale, the fireman in charge, was seated at a desk in the watch-room (known among firemen as the "lobby"), making an entry in a diary. All the other men—about thirteen in number—had gone to their respective homes and beds in the immediate neighbourhood, with the exception of the two whose turn it was to remain on duty all night. These two (named Baxmore and Corney), with their coats, belts, boots, and caps on, had just lain down on two low tressel couches, and were courting sleep. The helmets of their comrades hung on the walls round the room, with belts and hatchets underneath them. Several pairs of boots also graced the walls, and a small clock, whose gentle tick was the only sound that broke the silence of the night. In an outer room the dim form of a spare engine could be seen through the doorway.

The instant that the bell rang, however, this state of quietude was put to flight. The two men rose from their couches, and Dale stepped to the door. There was no starting up, no haste in their movements, yet there was prompt rapidity. The men, having been sailors, had been trained in the midst of alarms. The questions which were put to Hopkins, as above described, were rapidly uttered. Before they were answered the two men were ready, and at Dale's order, "Get her out!" they both vanished.

One ran round the corner to the engine-house and "knocked up" the driver in passing. The other ran from door to door of the firemen's abodes, which were close at hand, and with a loud double-ring summoned the sleepers. Before he got back to help the first with the engine, one and another and another door opened, and a man darted out, buttoning braces or coat as he ran. Each went into the station, seized his helmet, belt, and axe, from his own peg, and in another moment all were armed *cap-à-pie*. At the same instant that the engine appeared at the door a pair of horses were trotted up. Two men held them; two others fastened the traces; the driver sprang to his seat; the others leaped to their respective places. Each knew what to do,

and did it at once. There was no hurry, no loss of time, no excitement; some of the men, even while acting with the utmost vigour and promptitude, were yawning away their drowsiness; and in less than ten minutes from the moment the bell first rang the whip cracked and the fire-engine dashed away from the station amid the cheers of the crowd.

It may be as well to remark here in passing, that the London Fire Brigade had, at the time of which we write, reached a high state of efficiency, although it could not stand comparison with the perfection of system and unity of plan which mark the organisation and conduct of the Brigade of the present day.

Mr Braidwood, the able Superintendent, had for many years been training his men on a system, the original of which he had begun and proved in Edinburgh. Modifying his system to suit the peculiarities of the larger field to which he had been translated, he had brought the "Fire Engine Establishment," (which belonged at that time to several insurance companies) to a state of efficiency which rendered it a model and a training-school for the rest of the world; and although he had not the advantage of the telegraph or the powerful aid of the land steam fire-engine of the present day, he had men of the same metal as those which compose the force now.

The "Metropolitan Fire Brigade," as it then existed under the control of the Metropolitan Board of Works, had been carried by its chief, Captain Eyre Massey Shaw, to a condition of efficiency little if at all short of perfection, its only fault being (if we may humbly venture a remark) that it was too small both in numbers of engines and men.

Now, good reader, if you have never seen a London fire-engine go to a fire, you have no conception of what it is; and even if you have seen it, but have not gone with it, still you have no idea of what it is.

To those accustomed to it, no doubt, it may be tame enough—we cannot tell; but to those who mount an engine for the first time and drive through the crowded thoroughfares of London at a wild tearing gallop, it is probably the most exciting drive conceivable. It beats steeple-chasing. It feels like driving to destruction—so wild and so reckless is it. And yet it is not reckless in the strict sense of that word; for there is a stern *need-be* in the case. Every *moment* (not to mention minutes or hours) is of the utmost importance in the

progress of a fire. Fire smoulders and creeps at first, it may be, but when it has got the mastery, and bursts into flames, it flashes to its work and completes it quickly. At such times, one moment of time lost may involve thousands of pounds—ay, and many human lives! This is well known to those whose profession it is to fight the flames. Hence the union of apparent mad desperation, with cool, quiet self-possession in their proceedings. When firemen can work in silence they do so. No unnecessary word is uttered, no voice is needlessly raised. Like the movements of some beautiful steam-engine, which, with oiled pistons, cranks, and levers, does its unobtrusive work in its own little chamber in comparative stillness, yet with a power that would tear and rend to pieces buildings and machinery, so the firemen sometimes bend to their work quietly, though with mind and muscles strung to the utmost point of tension. At other times, like the roaring locomotive crashing through a tunnel or past a station, their course is a tumultuous rush, amid a storm of shouting and gesticulation.

So was it on the present occasion. Had the fire been distant, they would have had to commence their gallop somewhat leisurely, for fear of breaking down the horses; but it was not far off—not much more than a couple of miles—so they dashed round the corner of their own street at a brisk trot, and swept into Oxford Street. Here they broke into a gallop, and here the noise of their progress began, for the great thoroughfare was crowded with vehicles and pedestrians, many of whom were retiring from the theatres and music-halls, and other places of entertainment.

To pass through such a crowd without coming into collision with anything required not only the most dexterous driving, but rendered it necessary that some of the men on the engine should stand up and shout, or rather roar incessantly, as they whirled along, clearing everything out of their way, and narrowly escaping innumerable crashes by a mere hairbreadth.

The men, as we said before, having been sailors, seemed to shout with the memory of the boatswain strong upon them, for their tones were pitched in the deepest and gruffest bass-key. Sometimes there was a lull for a moment, as a comparatively clear space of a hundred yards or so lay before them; then their voices rose like the roaring of the gale as a stupid or deaf cabman got in their way, or a plethoric 'bus threatened to interrupt their furious passage.

The cross streets were the points where the chief difficulties met them. There the cab and van drivers turned into or crossed the great thoroughfare, all ignorant of the thunderbolt that was rushing on like a fiery meteor, with its lamps casting a glare of light before, and the helmets of its stern charioteers flashing back the rays of street-lamps and windows; for, late though the hour was, all the gin-palaces, and tobacconists' shops, and many of the restaurants were still open and brightly illuminated.

At the corner of Wells Street, the crowd of cabs and other vehicles was so great that the driver of the engine began to tighten his reins, and Jim Baxmore and Joe Corney raised their voices to a fierce shout. Cabs, 'busses, and pedestrians scattered right and left in a marvellous manner; the driver slackened his reins, cracked his whip, and the horses stretched out again.

In passing Berners Street, a hansom cab swept round the corner, its dashing driver smoking a cigar in sublime self-satisfaction, and looking carelessly right and left for a "fare." This exquisite almost ran into the engine! There was a terrific howl from all the firemen; the cabby turned his smart horse with a bound to one side, and lost his cigar in the act—in reference to which misfortune he was heartily congratulated by a small member of the Shoe-black Brigade,—while the engine went steadily and sternly on its way.

"There, it shows a light," observed one of the firemen to Dale, as he pointed to a luminous appearance in the sky away to the north-east.

Dale was already looking in that direction, and made no reply.

As they reached Tottenham Court Road the driver again checked the pace a little; yet even at the reduced speed they passed everything like a whirlwind. The traffic here was so great that it behoved them to be more cautious. Of course, the more need that there was for caution, the more necessity was there for shouting; and the duty of Baxmore and Corney—standing as they did in front of their comrades beside the driver—became severe, but they had good lungs both of them!

At the point where Tottenham Court Road cuts Oxford Street, the accumulation of vehicles of all sorts, from a hand-barrow to a furniture-van, is usually very great. To one unaccustomed to the

powers of London drivers, it would have seemed nothing short of madness to drive full tilt into the mass that blocked the streets at this point. But the firemen did it. They reined up a little, it is true, just as a hunter does in gathering his horse together for a rush at a stone wall, but there was nothing like an approach to stopping.

"Hi! Hi!! Hi!!!" roared the firemen, Baxmore and Corney high above the rest. A 'bus lumbered to the left just in time; a hansom sprang to the right, not a moment too soon; a luggage-van bolted into Crown Street; the pedestrians scattered right and left, and the way was clear—no, not quite clear! The engine had to turn at a right angle here into Tottenham Court Road. Round it went on the two off-wheels, and came full swing on a market-gardener and a hot-coffee woman, who were wheeling their respective barrows leisurely side by side, and chatting as they went.

The roar that burst from the firemen was terrific. The driver attempted both to pull up and to turn aside. The market-gardener dropt his barrow and fled. The hot-coffee woman, being of a resolute nature, thrust her barrow by main force on the footpath, and so saved her goods and herself by a hairbreadth, while the barrow of her friend was knocked in pieces. But the effort of the engine-driver to avoid this had well-nigh resulted in serious consequences. In endeavouring to clear the market-gardener he drew so near to the footpath that in another moment a lamp-post would have been carried away, and the wheels of the engine, in all probability, knocked off, had not Joe Corney observed the danger.

With a truly Irish yell Joe seized the rein next him, and pulled the horses round almost at a right angle. The nave of the hind-wheel just shaved the post as it flew by. The whole thing passed so swiftly that before the market-gardener recovered from his consternation the engine was only discernible in the distance by the sparks that flew from its wheels as it held on in its furious way.

All along its course a momentary disturbance of London equanimity was created. Families not yet abed rushed to their front windows, and, looking out, exclaimed, "Ha! the firemen." Tipplers in gin-palaces ran to the doors and said, "There they go," "That's your sort," "Hurrah, my hearties!" or, "Go it, ye cripples!" according to the different stages of inebriation at which they had arrived; and belated men of business stopped to gaze, and then resumed their way with thoughts and speculations on fire and fire insurance, more

or less deep and serious according to temperament. But the disturbance was only temporary. The families retired to their suppers or beds, the tipplers returned to their tipple, the belated speculators to their dreams, and in a few minutes (no doubt) forgot what they had seen, and forgot; perchance, that they had any personal interest in fire raising, or fire extinction, or fire prevention, or fire in any dangerous shape or form whatever, or indulged in the comforting belief, mayhap, that whatever disasters might attend the rest of the London community, they and their houses being endued with the properties of the salamander, nothing in the shape of fire might, could, would, or should kindle upon them. So true is it that, "all men think all men mortal but themselves!"

Do you doubt this, reader? If so, go poll your acquaintance, and tell us how many of them have got rope-ladders, or even ropes, to escape from their houses should they take fire; how many of them have got hand-pumps, or even buckets, placed so as to be handy in case of fire; and how many of them have got their houses and furniture insured against fire.

Meanwhile, the fire-engine held on its way, until it turned into Beverly Square, and pulled short up in front of the blazing mansion of James Auberly, Esquire.

Another engine was already at work there. It had come from a nearer station, of the existence of which Hopkins had been ignorant when he set out on his wild race for help. The men of this engine were already doing their work quietly, but with perceptible effect, pouring incessant streams of water in at the blazing windows, and watching for the slightest lull in the ferocity of the smoke and flame to attack the enemy at closer quarters.

Chapter Four.

A Fierce Fight With The Flames.

When the small boy—whose name, it may be as well to mention, was William (*alias* Willie) Willders—saw the fire-engine start, as has been already described, his whole soul yearned to follow it, for, in the course of his short life, he had never succeeded in being at the beginning of a fire, although he had often been at the middle and end of one—not a very difficult thing in London, by the way, seeing that there are, on the average, between four and five fires every twenty-four hours!

Willie Willders was of an enquiring disposition. He wanted to know how things were managed at a fire, from the beginning to the end, and he found that the course of true inquiry, like another course we wot of, never did run smooth.

Poor Willie's heart was with that engine, but his legs were not. They did their best, but they failed, strong and active though they were, to keep up with the horses. So Willie heaved a bursting sigh and slackened his speed—as he had often done before in similar circumstances—resolving to keep it in sight as long as he could, and trust to his eyesight and to the flames "showing a light" for the rest.

Just as he came to this magnanimous resolve, a strapping young gentleman called a passing cab, leaped in, ordered the driver to follow the engine, and offered double fare if he should keep it in view up to the fire.

Willie, being sharp as a needle, at once stepped forward and made as though he would open the door for the gentleman. The youth was already in and the door shut, but he smiled as he shouted to the driver, "All right!" and tossed a copper to Willie, with the remark, "There, you scamp!" The copper fell in the mud, and there Willie left it, as he doubled nimbly behind the vehicle, and laid hold of it.

The cabman did his best to earn his double fare, and thus it came to pass that Willie was in time to see the firemen commencing work.

As the young man leaped from the cab he uttered a cry of surprise and alarm, and rushed towards the crowd of firemen nearest to the burning house without paying his fare. Willie was a little astonished at this, but losing sight of the youth in the crowd, and seeing nothing more of him at that time, he became engrossed in other matters.

There were so many men on the ground, however—for just then a third engine dashed up to the scene of conflagration—that it was difficult for the excited boy to appreciate fully what he saw. He got as close to the engine, however, as the policemen would allow him, and observed that a fire-plug had been already opened, and over it had been placed a canvas cistern of about a yard long by eighteen inches broad, stretched on an iron frame. The cistern was filled with water to overflowing, and the first engine had placed its suction-pipe in it, while from the front of the engine extended the leathern hose that conveyed the water to the burning house.

Willie was deeply interested in this, and was endeavouring to solve certain knotty points in his own mind, when they were suddenly solved for him by a communicative dustman who stood in the crowd close by, and thus expounded the matter to his inquisitive son.

"You see, Tommy, the use o' the cistern is hobvious. See, here's 'ow it lies. If an ingin comes up an screwges its suction on to the plug, all the other ingins as comes after it has to stan' by an' do nuffin. But by puttin' the cistern over the plug an' lettin' it fill, another ingin or mabbe two more, can ram in its suction and drink away till it's fit to burst, d'ye see."

Willie drank in the information with avidity, and then turned his attention to the front of the engine, to which several lengths of hose, each forty feet long, had been attached. Baxmore and Corney were at the extreme end, screwing on the "branch" or nozzle by which the stream of water is directed, and Dale was tumbling a half-drunk and riotous navvy head-over-heels into the crowd, in order to convince him that his services to pump were not wanted—a sufficient number having been procured. A couple of policemen walked this navvy quietly from the scene, as Dale called out:

"Down with her, boys!"

"Pump away, lads!" said one of the firemen, interpreting.

The volunteers bent their backs, and the white clouds of steam that issued from the burning house showed that the second engine was doing its work well.

Immediately after, Dale and his men, with the exception of those required to attend the engine and the "branch," were ordered to get out the ladders.

He who gave this order was a tall, sinewy man, middle-aged apparently, and of grave demeanour. His dress was similar to that of the other firemen, but there was an air of quiet unobtrusive authority about him, which showed that he was a leader.

"We might get on the roof now, Mr Braidwood," suggested Dale, touching his helmet as he addressed the well-known chief of the London Fire-Engine Establishment.

"Not yet, Dale, not yet," said Braidwood; "get inside and see if you can touch the fire through the drawing-room floor. It's just fallen in."

Dale and his men at once entered the front door of the building, dragging the branch and hose along with them, and were lost in smoke.

Previous to the arrival of the fire-engines, however, a scene had been enacted which Willie Willders had not witnessed. A fire-escape was first to reach the burning house. This was then, and still is, usually the case, owing to the fact that escapes are far more numerous in London than engines, so that the former, being always close at hand, often accomplish their great work of saving life before the engines make their appearance.

The escape in the immediate neighbourhood of Beverly Square was under the charge of Conductor Samuel Forest, a man who, although young, had already saved many lives, in the service of the Society for the Protection of Life from Fire.

When Forest reached the field of action, Mr James Auberly was seen at an upper window in a state of undignified *dishabille*, shouting for help, and half suffocated with smoke, with Mrs Rose hanging round his neck on one side and Matty Merryon at the other. Poor Auberly, having tried the staircase on the first alarm, was driven back by

smoke, and rushed wildly to the window, where the two domestics, descending in terror from their attic, clung to him and rendered him powerless.

Forest at once pitched his escape—which was just a huge scientifically-constructed ladder, set on wheels. The head of it reached to the windows of the second floor. By pulling a rope attached to a lever, he raised a second ladder of smaller size, which was fitted to the head of the large one. The top of this second ladder was nearly sixty feet from the ground, and it reached the window at which Mr Auberly was still shouting. Forest at once sprang up.

"Leave me; save the women," gasped Auberly, as a man entered the room, but the dense smoke overpowered him as he spoke, and he fell forward. The women also sank to the ground.

Forest instantly seized Mrs Rose in his powerful arms, and hurrying down the ladder to the top of the escape, put her into the canvas trough or sack which was suspended below the ladder all the way. Down this she slid somewhat violently but safely to the ground, while Forest ran up again and rescued Matty in the same way. Mr Auberly was more difficult to manage, being a heavy man, and his rescuer was almost overpowered by the thick smoke in the midst of which all this was done. He succeeded, however, but fainted on reaching the ground.

It was at this point that the first engine arrived, and only a few minutes elapsed when the second made its appearance, followed by the cab from which the young man leapt with the exclamation of surprise and alarm that had astonished Willie Willders.

Pushing his way to the place where Mr Auberly and the others lay, the youth fell on his knees. "My father!" he exclaimed wildly.

"He's all right, lad," said Mr Braidwood, coming up at that moment, and laying his hand kindly on the youth's shoulder; "he's only choked with smoke, and will be better in a minute. Any more in the house?" he added quickly.

Young Auberly leaped up with a shout.

"My sister! is she not saved? Are *all* here?"

He waited not for a reply, but in another moment was on the fire-escape.

"After him, two of you," said Braidwood, turning to his men.

Two at once obeyed. In fact, they had leaped forward almost before the brief command was uttered. One of these firemen was conspicuous for his height and strength. He was first up the ladder. Close upon him followed Baxmore with a lantern.

Nothing but smoke had yet reached the room into which young Auberly entered, so that he instantly found himself in impenetrable darkness, and was almost choked as well as blinded.

"Have a care, Frank; the floor must be about gone by this time," said Baxmore, as he ran after his tall comrade.

The man whom he called Frank knew this. He also knew that it was not likely any one had been left in the room from which the master of the house had been rescued, and he thought it probable that his daughter would occupy a room on the same floor with her father. Acting on this supposition, and taking for granted that the room they were about to enter was Mr Auberly's bedroom, the tall fireman dashed at once through the smoke, and tumbled over the prostrate form of young Auberly.

"Look after him, Baxmore," he gasped, as he seized the lamp from his comrade's hand, and darted across the room and out into the passage, where he went crash against a door and burst it open. Here the smoke was not so dense, so that he could breathe, though with difficulty.

One glance showed him where the bed was. He felt it. A female form was lying on it. The light weight and the long hair which swept across his face as he raised it gently but swiftly on his shoulder, told him that it was that of a girl.

At that moment he heard a loud shout from the crowd, which was followed by a crash. Dashing once more across the passage, he saw that a lurid flame was piercing the smoke in the other room. The staircase he knew was impassable; probably gone by that time; but he had not time to think, so he drew the blanket over the girl's head

and bounded towards the window. There was a feeling of softness under his feet, as if the floor were made of pasteboard. He felt it sinking beneath him. Down it went, just as he laid hold of the head of the fire-escape, from which he hung suspended in the midst of the smoke and sparks that rose from the falling ruin.

Strong though the young fireman was, he could not raise himself by one arm, while the other was twined round Louisa Auberly. At that moment, Baxmore, having carried young Auberly down in safety, again ascended and appeared at the window. He seized Frank by the hair of the head.

"Let go my hair, and catch the girl!" shouted Frank.

"All right," said Baxmore, seizing Loo and lifting her over the window sill.

Frank being thus relieved, swung himself easily on the sill, and grasping Loo once more, descended to the street, where he was met by Mr Auberly, who had recovered from his state of partial suffocation, and who seized his child and hurried with her into a neighbouring house. Thither he was followed by Mrs Rose and Matty, who had also recovered.

During these episodes, the firemen had continued at their work with cool and undistracted attention. And here the value of organisation was strikingly and beautifully brought out; for, while the crowd swayed to and fro, now breathless with anxiety lest the efforts of the bold conductor of the fire-escape should fail; anon wild with excitement and loud in cheers when he succeeded, each fireman paid devoted and exclusive attention to his own prescribed piece of duty, as if nothing else were going on around him, and did it with all his might—well knowing that every other piece of work was done, or point of danger guarded, by a comrade, while the eagle eyes of Mr Braidwood and his not less watchful foremen superintended all, observed and guided, as it were, the field of battle.

And truly, good generalship was required, for the foe was fierce and furious. The "devouring element" rushed onward like a torrent. The house was large and filled with rich furniture, which was luxurious food for the flames as they swept over the walls, twined round the balustrades, swallowed the paintings, devoured the woodwork, and

melted the metal in their dread progress. But the foe that met them was, on this occasion, more than a match for the flames. It was a hand-to-hand encounter. The men followed them foot by foot, inch by inch—sometimes almost singeing their beards or being well-nigh choked and blinded by dense volumes of smoke, but, if driven back, always returning to the charge. The heat at times beat on their helmets so fiercely that they were forced to turn their faces aside and half-turn their backs on the foe, but they *always* kept their weapons—the "branches"—to the front, and continued to discharge upon him tons and tons of aqueous artillery.

"Get up to the windows now; use the escape," said Mr Braidwood; and as he said this he passed through the doorway of the burning house.

Some of the men rushed up the escape and let down a line, to which one of the branches was made fast.

"Avast pumpin', number two!" shouted Baxmore from the midst of clouds of smoke that were bursting out from the window.

Number two engine was stopped. Its branch was pulled up and pointed inside *straight at the fire*; the signal given, "Down with number two!" and a hiss was followed by volumes of steam.

The work of extinction had at last begun in real earnest. As long as they could only stand in the street and throw water in through the windows at haphazard, they might or might not hit the fire—and at all events they could not attack its strong points; but now, Baxmore at one window, and one of the men of the first engine at another, played point-blank into the flames, and, wherever the water hit, they were extinguished. Presently they got inside and began to be able to see through the smoke; a blue glimmer became visible, the branch was pointed, and it was gone. By this time the second floor had partly given way, and fire was creeping down the rafters to the eaves of the house. Baxmore observed this; and pointed the branch straight up. The fire at that part was put out, and a heavy shower of water fell back on the fireman, drenching him to the skin.

The attack had now become general. The firemen swarmed in at the doors and windows the moment that it was possible for a human being to breathe the smoke and live. One of the engines attached two

additional lengths of hose, dragged the branch through the first floor to the back of the house, got upon an outhouse, in at a back window, and attacked the foe in rear. On the roof, Frank and Dale were plying their hatchets, their tall figures sharply defined against the wintry sky, and looking more gigantic than usual. The enemy saved them the trouble of cutting through, however, for it suddenly burst upwards, and part of the roof fell in. It would certainly have taken Frank prisoner had not Dale caught him by the collar, and dragged him out of danger. Instantly a branch was pointed downwards, and the foe was beaten back; from above, below, before, and behind, it was now met with deluges of water, which fell on the shoulders of the men in the lower floor in a continuous hot shower, while they stood ankle-deep in hot water.

In ten minutes after this the fire was effectually subdued, the lower floor having been saved, although its contents were severely damaged by water.

It was only necessary now, that one of the engines should remain for a time, to make good the victory. The others rolled up their hose, and prepared to depart. The King Street engine was the first to quit the field of battle. While the men were getting ready, Mr Auberly, muffled in a long cloak, stepped from the crowd and touched Frank, the tall fireman, on the shoulder.

"Sir," said he in a low voice, "you saved my child. I would show my sense of gratitude. Will you accept of this purse?"

Frank shook his head and a smile played on his smoke-begrimed countenance as he said:

"No, Mr Auberly. I am obliged to you, but I cannot accept of it. I do not want it, and besides, the men of the brigade are not allowed to take money."

"But you will let me do something for you?" urged Mr Auberly. "Is there nothing that I can do?"

"Nothing, sir," said Frank. He paused for a moment, and then resumed—"Well, there *is* something that perhaps you could do, sir. I have a little brother out of employment; if you could get him a situation, sir."

"I will," said Mr Auberly with emotion. "Send him to me on Thursday forenoon. He will find me living next door to my—to my late home. I shall stay with a friend there for some time. Good-night."

"Men of King Street engine get up," cried Dale. "Stay—what is your name?" said Mr Auberly turning round.

But Frank was gone. He had leaped to his place on the engine and was off at a rattling pace through the now silent and deserted streets of the sleeping city.

Although they drove on at great speed there was no shouting now, for neither 'bus, cab, nor foot-passenger blocked up the way, and the men, begrimed with smoke and charcoal, wet, and weary with two hours of almost uninterrupted labour of a severe as well as dangerous character, sat or stood in their places in perfect silence.

On reaching the fire-station they leaped to the ground, and all went quickly and silently to their neighbouring homes and beds, except the two men on duty. These, changing their coats and boots, lay down on the trestles, and at once fell fast asleep—the engine and horses having been previously housed—and then Dale sat down to make an entry of the event in his day-book.

The whole thing might have been only a vivid dream, so silent was the room and so devoid of any evidence of recent excitement, while the reigning tranquillity was enhanced rather than decreased by the soft breathing of the sleepers, the ticking of the clock, and the scratching of Dale's pen as he briefly recorded the facts of the fire that night in Beverly Square.

Chapter Five.

Willie Willders in Difficulties.

During the progress of the fire, small Willie Willders was in a state of the wildest, we might almost say hilarious, excitement; he regarded not the loss of property; the fire never struck him in *that* light. His little body and big spirit rejoiced in the whole affair as a magnificent display of fireworks and heroism.

When the fire burst through the library windows he shouted; when Sam Forest, the conductor of the fire-escape, saved Mr Auberly and the women, he hurrahed; when the tall fireman and Baxmore rescued Louisa Auberly he cheered and cheered again until his shrill voice rose high above the shouting of the crowd. When the floors gave way he screamed with delight, and when the roof fell in he shrieked with ecstasy.

Sundry and persevering were the efforts he made to break through the police by fair means and foul; but, in his energy, he over-reached himself, for he made himself so conspicuous that the police paid special attention to him, and wherever he appeared he was snubbed and thrust back, so that his great desire to get close to the men while they were at work was frustrated.

Willie had a brother who was a fireman, and he wished earnestly that he might recognise him, if present; but he knew that, being attached to the southern district of the City, he was not likely to be there, and even if he were, the men were all so much alike in their uniform, that it was impossible at a distance to distinguish one from another. True it is that his brother was uncommonly tall, and very strong; but as the London firemen were all picked men, many of them were very tall, and all of them were strong.

Not until the last engine left the ground, did Willie Willders think it advisable to tear himself away, and hasten to his home in Notting Hill, where he found his mother sitting up for him in a state of considerable anxiety. She forebore to question him that night, however.

When Willie appeared next morning—or rather, the same morning, for it was nearly four o'clock when he went to bed—he found his mother sitting by the fire knitting a sock.

Mrs Willders was a widow, and was usually to be found seated by the fire, knitting a sock, or darning one, or mending some portion of male attire.

"So you were at a fire last night, Willie?" said the widow.

"Yes, I was," replied the boy, going up to his mother, and giving her what he styled a "roystering" kiss, which she appeared to like, although she was scarcely able to bear it, being thin and delicately formed, and somewhat weak from bad health.

"No lives lost, I hope, Willie?"

"No; there ain't often lives lost when Sam Forest, the fire-escape-man, is there. You know Forest, mother, the man that we've heard so much of? Ah, it *was* sitch fun! You've no notion! It would have made you split your sides wi' laughin' if you'd seen Sam come out o' the smoke carryin' the master o' the house on his shoulder in his shirt and drawers, with only one sock on, an' his nightcap tied so tight under his chin that they had to cut it off—him in a swound, too, hangin' as limp as a dead eel on Sam's shoulder, with his head down one side, an' his legs down the other. Oh, it *was* a lark!"

The boy recalled "the lark" to his own mind so vividly, that he had to stop at this point, in order to give vent to an uproarious fit of laughter.

"Was Frank there?" inquired the widow, when the fit subsided.

"Not that I know of, mother; I looked hard for him, but didn't see him. There was lots o' men big enough to be him; but I couldn't get near enough to see for the bobbies. I wonder what them bobbies were made for!" continued Willie, with a look of indignation, as he seated himself at the table, and began to eat a hearty breakfast; "the long lamp-posts! that are always in the way when nobody wants 'em. I do believe they was invented for nothin' else than to aggravate small boys and snub their inquiring minds."

"Where was the fire, Willie?"

"In Beverly Square. I say, mother, if that there grocer don't send us better stuff than this here bacon in future, I'll—I'll have to give him up."

"I can't afford to get better, dear," said the widow meekly.

"I know that, mother; but *he* could afford to *give* better. However, it's down now, so it don't much matter."

"Did you hear whose house was burned, Willie?"

"A Mr Oberly, or somethin' like that."

"Auberly!" exclaimed the widow, with a start.

"Well, p'raps it is Auberly; but whichever it is, he's got a pretty kettle o' fish to look after this mornin'. You seem to have heard of him before, mother?"

"Yes, Willie, I—I know him a— at least I have met with him often. You see I was better off once, and used to mingle with— but I need not trouble you with that. On the strength of our former acquaintance, I thought I would write and ask him to get you a situation in an office, and I have got a letter from him, just before you came down to breakfast, saying that he will do what he can, and bidding me send you to him between eleven and twelve to-morrow."

"Whew!" whistled Willie, "an' he burnt out o' house and home, without a coat to his back or a shoe to his foot. It strikes me I'll have to try to get *him* a situation."

"He won't be found at the house, now, I dare say, my son, so we'll have to wait a little; but the burning of his house and furniture won't affect him much, for he's rich."

"Humph! p'raps not," said Willie; "but the burnin' of his little girl might have—"

"You said that *no* lives were lost," cried Mrs Willders, turning pale.

"No more there was, mother; but if it hadn't bin for one o' the firemen that jumped in at a blazin' winder an' brought her out through fire an' smoke, she'd have bin a cinder by this time, an' money wouldn't have bought the rich man another daughter, *I* know."

"True, my son," observed Mrs Willders, resting her forehead on her hand; then, as if suddenly recollecting something, she looked up and said, "Willie, I want you to go down to the City with these socks to Frank. This is his birthday, and I sat late last night on purpose to get them finished. His station is a long way *off*, I know, but you've nothing else to do, so—"

"Nothin' else to do, mother!" exclaimed Willie; with an offended look. "Haven't I got to converse in a friendly way with all the crossin'-sweepers an' shoeblacks an' stall-women as I go along, an' chaff the cabbies, an' look in at all the shop-windows, and insult the bobbies? I *always* insult the bobbies. It does me good. I hurt 'em, mentally, as much as I can, an' I'd hurt 'em bodily if I could. But every dog has his day. When I grow up *won't* I pitch into 'em!"

He struck the table with his fist, and, shaking back his curly hair, lifted his blue eyes to his mother's face with a stern expression, which gradually relaxed into a smile.

"Ah, you needn't grin, mother, an' tell me that the '*policemen*' are a fine set of men, and quite as brave and useful in their way as the firemen. I know all you respectable sort of people think that; but *I* don't. They're my natural enemies, and I hate 'em. Come, mother, give me the socks and let me be off."

Soon the vigorous urchin was on his way to the City, whistling, as usual, with all his might. As he passed the corner of the British Museum a hand touched him on the shoulder, and its owner said:

"How much are ye paid a week, lad, for kicking up such a row?"

Willie looked round, and his eyes encountered the brass buckle of the waist-belt of a tall, strapping fellow in a blue uniform. Glancing upwards, he beheld the handsome countenance of his brother Frank looking down at him with a quiet smile. He wore no helmet, for

except when attending a fire the firemen wear a sailor-like blue cloth cap.

"Hallo, Blazes! is that you?" cried the boy.

"Just so, Willie; goin' down to Watling Street to attend drill."

Willie (who had styled his brother "Blazes" ever since he joined the fire brigade) observed that he happened to be going in the same direction to deliver a message from his mother to a relation, which he would not speak about, however, just then, as he wished to tell him of a fire he had been at last night.

"A fire, lad; was it a big one?"

"Ay, that it was; a case o' burnin'-out almost; *and there were lives saved*," said the boy with a look of triumph; "and that's more than you can say you've seen, though you *are* a fireman."

"Well, you know I have not been long in the brigade, Willie, and as the escapes often do their work before the engines come up, I've not had much chance yet of seeing lives saved. How was it done?"

With glowing eyes and flushed cheeks Willie at once launched out into a vivid description of the scene he had so recently witnessed, and dwelt particularly on the brave deeds of Conductor Forest and the tall fireman. Suddenly he looked up at his brother.

"Why, what are you chucklin' at, Blazes?"

"Nothing, lad. Was the fireman *very* tall?"

"That he certainly was—uncommon tall."

"Something like *me*?" said Frank.

A gleam of intelligence shot across the boy's face as he stopped and caught his brother by the sleeve, saying earnestly:

"It wasn't *you*, Frank, *was* it?"

"It was, Willie, and right glad am I to have been in such good luck as to save Miss Auberly."

Willie grasped his brother's hand and shook it heartily.

"You're a brick, Blazes," said he, "and this is your birthday, an' I wish you luck an' long life, my boy. You'll do me credit yet, if you go on as you've begun. Now, I'll go right away back an' tell mother. Won't she be fit to bu'st?"

"But what about your message to the relation in the City?" inquired Frank.

"That relation is yourself, and here's the message, in the shape of a pair o' socks from mother; knitted with her own hands; and, by the way, that reminds me—how came you to be at the fire last night? It's a long way from your station."

"I've been changed recently," said Frank; "poor Grove was badly hurt about the loins at a fire in New Bond Street last week, and I have been sent to take his place, so I'm at the King Street station now. But I have something more to tell you before you go, lad, so walk with me a bit farther."

Willie consented, and Frank related to him his conversation with Mr Auberly in reference to himself.

"I thought of asking leave and running out this afternoon to tell you, so it's as well we have met, as it will—Why, what are *you* chuckling at, Willie?"

This question was put in consequence of the boy's eyes twinkling and his cheeks reddening with suppressed merriment.

"Never mind, Blazes. I haven't time to tell you just now. I'll tell you some other time. So old Auberly wants to see me to-morrow forenoon?"

"That's what he said to me," returned Frank.

"Very good; I'll go. Adoo, Blazes—farewell."

So saying, Willie Willders turned round and went off at a run, chuckling violently. He attempted to whistle once or twice, but his mouth refused to retain the necessary formation, so he contented himself with chuckling instead. And it is worthy of record that that small boy was so much engrossed with his own thoughts on this particular occasion that he did not make one observation, bad, good, or indifferent, to any one during his walk home. He even received a question from a boy smaller than himself as to whether "his mother knew he was out," without making any reply, and passed innumerable policemen without even a thought of vengeance!

"Let me see," said he, muttering to himself as he paused beside the Marble Arch at Hyde Park, and leaned his head against the railings of that structure; "Mr Auberly has been an' ordered two boys to be sent to him to-morrow forenoon—ha! he! sk!" (the chuckling got the better of him here)—"very good. An' my mother has ordered one o' the boys to go, while a tall fireman has ordered the other. Now, the question is, which o' the two boys am I—the *one* or the *t'other*—ha! sk! ho! Well, of course, *both* o' the boys will go; they can't help it, there's no gittin' over that; but, then, which of 'em will git the situation? There's a scruncher for you, Mr Auberly. You'll have to fill your house with tar an' turpentine an' set fire to it over again 'afore you'll throw light on *that* pint. S'pose I should go in for *both* situations! It *might* be managed. The first boy could take a well-paid situation as a clerk, an the second boy might go in for night-watchman at a bank." (Chuckling again interrupted the flow of thought.) "P'raps the two situations might be got in the same place o' business; that would be handy! Oh! if one o' the boys could only be a girl, *what* a lark that would—sk! ha! ha!"

He was interrupted at this point by a shoe-black, who remarked to his companion:

"I say, Bob, 'ere's a lark. 'Ere's a feller bin an got out o' Bedlam, a larfin' at nothink fit to burst hisself!"

So Willie resumed his walk with a chuckle that fully confirmed the member of the black brigade in his opinion.

He went home chuckling and went to bed chuckling, without informing his mother of the cause of his mirth. Chuckling he arose on the following morning, and, chuckling still, went at noon to

Beverly Square, where he discovered Mr Auberly standing, gaunt and forlorn, in the midst of the ruins of his once elegant mansion.

Chapter Six.

"When one is another who is which?"

"Well, boy, what do you want? Have you anything to say to me?"

Mr Auberly turned sharp round on Willie, whose gaze had gone beyond the length of simple curiosity. In fact, he was awe-struck at the sight of such a very tall and very dignified man standing so grimly in the midst of such dreadful devastation.

"Please, sir, I was sent to you, sir, by—"

"Oh, you're the boy, the son of—that is to say, you were sent to me by your mother," said Mr Auberly with a frown.

"Well, sir," replied Willie, hesitating, "I—I—was sent by—by—"

"Ah, I see," interrupted Mr Auberly with a smile that was meant to be gracious, "you were sent by a fireman; you are not the—the—I mean you're the *other* boy."

Poor Willie, being of a powerfully risible nature, found it hard to contain himself on hearing his own words of the previous evening re-echoed thus unexpectedly. His face became red, and he took refuge in blowing his nose, during which process—having observed the smile on Mr Auberly's face—he resolved to be "the other boy."

"Yes, sir," he said, looking up modestly, "I was sent by a fireman; I *am* the other boy."

Mr Auberly smiled again grimly, and said that the fireman was a brave fellow, and that he had saved his daughter's life, and that he was very glad to do anything that lay in his power for him, and that he understood that Willie was the fireman's brother; to which the boy replied that he was.

"Well, then, come this way," continued Mr Auberly, leading Willie into the library of the adjoining house, which his friend had put at his disposal, and seating himself at a writing-table. "You want a situation of some sort—a clerkship, I suppose?"

Willie admitted that his ambition soared to that tremendous height.

"Let me see," muttered Mr Auberly, taking up a pen and beginning to write; "yes, she will be able to help me. What is your name, boy?"

"Willie, sir."

"Just so, William; and your surname—your other name?"

"Willders, sir."

Mr Auberly started, and looked Willie full in the eyes. Willie, feeling that he was playing a sort of double part without being able to avoid it, grew red in the face.

"What did you say, boy?"

"Willders," replied Willie stoutly.

"Then you're *not* the other boy," said Mr Auberly, laying down his pen, and regarding Willie with a frown.

"Please, sir," replied Willie, with a look of meekness which was mingled with a feeling of desperation, for his desire to laugh was strong upon him, "please, sir, I don't rightly know *which* boy I am."

Mr Auberly paused for a moment.

"Boy, you're a fool!"

"Thank 'ee, sir," said Willie.

This reply went a long way in Mr Auberly's mind to prove the truth of his assertion.

"Answer me, boy," said Mr Auberly with an impressive look and tone; "were you sent here by a fireman?"

"Yes, sir," replied Willie.

"What is his name?"

"Same as mine, sir—Willders."

"Of course, of course," said Mr Auberly, a little confused at having put such an unnecessary question. "Does your *mother* know you're here?"

This brought the slang phrase, "Does your mother know you're out?" so forcibly to the boy's mind, that he felt himself swell internally, and had recourse again to his pocket-handkerchief as a safety-valve.

"Yes, sir," said he, on recovering his composure; "arter I saw Blazes—Frank, I mean, that's my brother, sir—I goes right away home to bed. I stops with my mother, sir, an' she saw me come off here this mornin', sir. She knows I was comin' here."

"Of course; yes, yes, I see," muttered Mr Auberly, again taking up his pen. "I see; yes, yes; same name—strange coincidence, though; but, after all, there are many of that name in London. I suppose the *other* boy will be here shortly. Very odd, very odd indeed."

"Please, sir," observed Willie, in a gentle tone, "you said *I* was the other boy, sir."

Mr Auberly seemed a little annoyed at his muttered words being thus replied to, yet he condescended to explain that there was another boy of the same name whom he expected to see that morning.

"Oh, then there's *another* other boy, sir?" said Willie with a look of interest.

"Hold your tongue!" said Mr Auberly in a sharp voice; "you're a fool, and you're much too fond of speaking. I advise you to keep your tongue quieter if you wish to get on in life."

Willie once more sought relief in his pocket-handkerchief, while his patron indited and sealed an epistle, which he addressed to "Miss Tippet, Number 6, Poorthing Lane, Beverly Square."

"Here, boy, take this to the lady to whom it is addressed—the lane is at the opposite corner of the square—and wait an answer."

"Am I to bring the answer back to you, sir?" asked Willie with much humility.

"No; the answer is for yourself," said Mr Auberly testily; "and hark 'ee, boy, you need not trouble me again. That note will get you all you desire."

"Thank you, sir," said Willie, making a bow, and preparing to retire; "but please, sir, I don't very well know, that is to say—ahem!"

"Well, boy?" said the patron sternly.

"Excuse me, sir; I can't help it, you know; but please, sir, I wish to explain about that other boy—no, that's me, but the *other* other boy, you know—"

"Begone, boy!" cried Mr Auberly in a voice so stern that Willie found himself next moment in the street, along which he ran chuckling worse than ever.

A little reflection might have opened Mr Auberly's eyes to the truth in regard to Willie, but a poor relation was to him a disagreeable subject of contemplation, and he possessed the faculty, in an eminent degree, of dismissing it altogether from his mind. Having care enough on his mind at that time, poor man, he deliberately cast the confusion of the two boys out of his thoughts, and gave himself up to matters more interesting and personal.

We may add here that Mrs Willders was faithful to her promise, and never more addressed her brother-in-law by word or letter. When Willie afterwards told her and Frank of the absurdity of his interview, and of the violent manner in which Mr Auberly had dismissed him when he was going to explain about the "other" boy, his mother thought it best to let things rest as they stood, yet she often wondered in her own quiet way what Mr Auberly would think of her and of the non-appearance of the "other" boy; and she felt convinced that if he only put things together he *must* come to understand that Willie and Frank were her sons. But Mrs Willders did not know of the before-mentioned happy facility which her kinsman possessed of forgetting poor relations; so, after wondering on for a time, she ceased to wonder or to think about it at all.

Chapter Seven.

Thoughts in regard to Men.

Miss Emelina Tippet was a maiden lady of pleasing countenance and exceedingly uncertain age.

She was a poor member of a poor branch of an aristocratic family, and feeling an unconquerable desire to breathe, if not the pure unadulterated atmosphere of Beverly Square, at least as much of it as was compatible with a very moderate income, she rented a small house in a very dark and dismal lane leading out of that great centre of refinement.

It is true that Beverly Square was not exactly the "West End," but there are many degrees of West-endiness, so to speak, in the western neighbourhood of London, and this square was, in the opinion of Miss Tippet, the West-endiest place she knew, because there dwelt in it, not only a very genteel and uncommonly rich portion of the community, but several of her own aristocratic, though distant, relations, among whom was Mr Auberly.

The precise distance of the relationship between them had never been defined, and all records bearing on it having been lost in the mists of antiquity, it could not now be ascertained; but Miss Tippet laid claim to the relationship, and as she was an obliging, good-humoured, chatty, and musical lady, Mr Auberly admitted the claim.

Miss Tippet's only weakness—for she was indeed a most estimable woman—was a tendency to allow rank and position to weigh too much in her esteem. She had also a sensitive abhorrence of everything "low and vulgar," which would have been, of course, a very proper feeling had she not fallen into the mistake of considering humble birth lowness, and want of polish vulgarity—a mistake which is often (sometimes even wilfully) made by persons who consider themselves much wiser than Miss Tippet, but who are not wise enough to see a distinct shade of true vulgarity in their own sentiments.

The dark, dismal lane, named Poorthing Lane, besides forming an asylum for decayed and would-be aristocrats, and a vestibule, as it

were, to Beverly Square, was a convenient retreat for sundry greengrocers and public-house keepers and small trades-people, who supplied the densely-peopled surrounding district, and even some of the inhabitants of Beverly Square itself, with the necessaries of life. It was also a thoroughfare for the gay equipages of the square, which passed through it daily on their way to and from the adjoining stables, thereby endangering the lives of precocious babies who could crawl, but could not walk away from home, as well as affording food for criticism and scandal, not to mention the leaving behind of a species of secondhand odour of gentility such as coachmen and footmen can give forth.

Miss Tippet's means being small, she rented a proportionately small residence, consisting of two floors, which were the upper portion of a house, whose ground floor was a toy-shop. The owner of the toy-shop, David Boone, was Miss Tippet's landlord; but not the owner of the tenement. He rented the whole, and sublet the upper portion. Miss Tippet's parlour windows commanded a near view of the lodging opposite, into every corner and crevice of which she could have seen, had not the windows been encrusted with impenetrable dirt. Her own domestic arrangements were concealed from view by small green venetian blinds, which rose from below, and met the large venetians which descended from above. The good lady's bedroom windows in the upper floor commanded a near view—much too near—of a stack of chimneys, between which and another stack, farther over, she had a glimpse of part of the gable end of a house, and the topmost bough of a tree in Beverly Square. It was this prospect into paradise, terrestrially speaking, that influenced Miss Tippet in the choice of her abode.

When William Willders reached the small door of Number 6, Poorthing Lane, and raised his hand to knock, the said door opened as if it had been trained to admit visitors of its own accord, and Miss Matty Merryon issued forth, followed by a bright blue-eyed girl of about twelve years of age.

"Well, boy, was ye comin' here?" inquired Matty, as the lad stepped aside to let them pass.

"Yes, I was. Does Miss Tippet live here?"

"She does, boy, what d'ye want with her?"

"I want to see her, young 'ooman, so you'd better cut away up an' tell her a gen'lm'n requests a few words private conversation with her."

The little girl laughed at this speech, and Matty, addressing Willie as a "dirty spalpeen," said he had better go with her to a shop first, and she'd then take him back and introduce him to Miss Tippet.

"You see I can't let ye in all be yer lone, cushla; for what would the neighbours say, you know! I'm only goin' to the toy-shop, an' won't kape ye a minit, for Miss Emma don't take long to her bargains."

Willie might probably have demurred to this delay; but on hearing that the blue-eyed girl wanted to make purchases, he at once agreed to the proposal, and followed them into the toy-shop.

David Boone, who stepped out of the back-shop to serve them, was, if we may say so, very unlike his trade. A grave, tall, long-legged, long-nosed, raw-boned, melancholy-looking creature such as he, might have been an undertaker, or a mute, or a sexton, or a policeman, or a horse-guardsman, or even a lawyer; but it was the height of impropriety to have made him a toy-shopman, and whoever did it had no notion whatever of the fitness of things. One could not resist the idea that his clumsy legs would certainly upset the slender wooden toys with which the floor and counters were covered, and his fingers seemed made to break things. The figure of Punch which hung from the ceiling appeared inclined to hit him as he passed to and fro, and the pretty little dolls with the sweet pink faces, and very flaxen hair and cerulean eyes were evidently laughing at him.

Nevertheless, David Boone was a kind-hearted man, very fond of children, and extremely unlike, in some respects, what people imagined him at first sight to be.

"Well, Miss Ward, what can I supply you with to-day?" said he blandly.

"Please, Mr Boone, I want a slate and a piece of slate-pencil." Emma looked up with a sweet smile at the tall shopman, who looked down upon her with grave benignity, as he produced the articles required.

"D'you kape turpentine?" said Matty, as they were about to quit the shop.

Boone started, and said almost testily, "No, I *don't*. Why do you ask?"

"Sure, there's no sin in askin'," replied Matty in surprise at the man's changed manner.

"Of course—of course not," rejoined Boone with a slight look of confusion, as he made a sudden assault with his pocket-handkerchief on the cat, which was sleeping innocently in the window; "git out o' that, you brute; you're always agoin' in the winder, capsizin' things. There! you've been an' sat on the face o' that 'ere wax doll till you've a'most melted it. Out o' that with you! No, Miss Merryon," he added, turning to the girl with his wonted urbanity, "I don't keep turpentine, and I was only surprised you should ask for it in a toy-shop; but you'll get it of Mr White next door. I don't believe there's anythink in the world as he can't supply to his customers."

David Boone bowed them out, and then re-entered the back-shop, shaking his head slowly from side to side.

"I don't like it—I don't even like to think of it, Gorman," he said to a big low-browed man who sat smoking his pipe beside the little fireplace, the fire in which was so small that its smoke scarcely equalled in volume that of the pipe he smoked: "No, I *don't* like it, and I *won't do it*."

"Well, well, you can please yourself," said Gorman, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and placing it in his vest pocket as he rose and buttoned his thick pea-jacket up to the chin; "but I'll tell you what it is, if you *are* a descendant of the hunter of the far west that you boast so much about, it's precious little of his pluck that you've got; an' so I tell 'ee to your face, David Boone. All I've got to say is, that you'd better be wise and take my advice, and think better of it."

So saying, Gorman went out, and slammed the door after him.

Meanwhile, Miss Matty Merryon, having purchased a small phial of turpentine, returned to Number 6, and ushered Willie Willders into the presence of her mistress.

Miss Emelina Tippet was neither tall nor stiff, nor angular nor bony; on the contrary, she was little and plump, and not bad-looking. And people often wondered why Miss Tippet *was* Miss Tippet and was not Mrs Somebody-else. Whatever the reason was, Miss Tippet never divulged it, so we won't speculate about it here.

"A note, boy, from Mr Auberly?" exclaimed Miss Tippet, with a beaming smile; "give it me—thank you."

She opened it and read attentively, while Master Willie glanced round the parlour and took mental notes. Miss Emma Ward sat down on a stool in the window, ostensibly to "do sums," but really to draw faces, all of which bore a strong caricatured resemblance to Willie, at whom she glanced slyly over the top of her slate.

Matty remained standing at the door to hear what the note was about. She did not pretend to busy herself about anything. There was no subterfuge in Matty. She had been Miss Tippet's confidential servant before entering the service of Mr Auberly, and her extremely short stay in Beverly Square had not altered that condition. She had come to feel that she had a right to know all Miss Tippet's affairs, and so waited for information.

"Ah!" exclaimed Miss Tippet, still reading, "yes; 'get him a situation in your brother's office,' (oh, certainly, I'll be sure to get that); 'he seems smart, I might almost say impu—' Ahem! Yes, well—."

"Boy," said Miss Tippet, turning suddenly to Willie, "your name is William Willders, I believe?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, William, Mr Auberly, my relative, asks me to get you into my brother's—my brother's, what's 'is name—office. Of course, I shall be happy to try. I am always extremely happy to do anything for—yes, I suppose of course you can write, and, what d'ye call it—count—you can do arithmetic?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied Willie.

"And you can spell—eh? I hope you can *spell*, Edward, a—I mean Thomas—is it, or William?"

Miss Tippet looked at Willie so earnestly and put this question in tones so solemn that he was much impressed, and felt as if all his earthly hopes hung on his reply, so he admitted that he could spell.

"Good," continued Miss Tippet. "You are, I suppose, in rather poor circumstances. Is your father poor?"

"He's dead, ma'am; was drowned."

"Oh! shocking, that's very sad. Was your mother drowned, too?"

"No, ma'am, she's alive and well—at least she's well for *her*, but she an't over strong. That's why I want to get work, that I may help her; and she wants me to be a clerk in a office, but I'd rather be a fireman. You couldn't make me a fireman, could you, ma'am?"

At this point Willie caught Miss Ward gazing intently at him over the top of her slate, so he threw her into violent confusion by winking at her.

"No, boy, I can't make you a fireman. Strange wish—why d'you want to be one?"

"'Cause it's such jolly fun," replied Willie; with real enthusiasm, "reg'lar bangin' crashin' sort o' work—as good as fightin' any day! An' my brother Frank's a fireman. Such a one, too, you've no notion; six fut four he is, an' as strong as—oh, why, ma'am, he could take you up in one hand, ma'am, an' twirl you round his head like an old hat! He was at the fire in Beverly Square last night."

This speech was delivered with such vehemence, contained so many objectionable sentiments, and involved such a dreadful supposition in regard to the treatment of Miss Tippet's person, that the worthy lady was shocked beyond all expression. The concluding sentence, however, diverted her thoughts.

"Ah! was he indeed at that sad fire, and did he help to put it out?"

"Sure, an' he did more than that," exclaimed Matty, regarding the boy with sudden interest. "If that was yer brother that saved Miss Loo he's a ra'al man—"

"Saved Loo!" cried Miss Tippet; "was it *your* brother that saved Loo?"

"Yes, ma'am, it was."

"Bless him; he is a noble fellow, and I have great pleasure in taking you by the hand for his sake."

Miss Tippet suited the action to the word, and seized Willie's hand, which she squeezed warmly. Matty Merryon, with tears in her eyes, embraced him, and said that she only wished she had the chance of embracing his brother, too. Then they all said he must stay to lunch, as it was about lunchtime, and Miss Tippet added that he deserved to have been born in a higher position in life—at least his brother did, which was the same thing, for he was a true what's-'is-name, who ought to be crowned with thingumyjigs.

Emma, who had latterly been looking at Willie with deepening respect, immediately crowned him with laurels on the slate, and then Matty rushed away for the lunch-tray—rejoicing in the fire, that had sent her back so soon to the old mistress whom she never wanted to leave; that had afforded scope for the display of such heroism, and had brought about altogether such an agreeable state of unwonted excitation.

Just as the party were on the point of sitting down to luncheon, the street-door knocker was applied to the door with an extremely firm touch.

"Miss Deemas!" exclaimed Miss Tippet. "Oh! I'm *so* glad. Rush, Matty."

Matty rushed, and immediately there was a sound on the wooden passage as of a gentleman with heavy boots. A moment later, and Matty ushered in a very tall, broad-shouldered, strapping lady; if we may venture to use that expression in reference to one of the fair sex.

Miss Deemas was a sort of human eagle. She had an eagle eye, an aquiline nose, an eagle flounce, and an eagle heart. Going up to Miss Tippet, she put a hand on each of her shoulders, and stooping down, pecked her, so to speak, on each cheek.

"How are you, my dear?" said Miss Deemas, not by any means tenderly; but much in the tone in which one would expect to have one's money or one's life demanded.

"Quite well, dear Julia, and *so* glad to see you. It is *so* good of you to take me by surprise this way; just at lunch-time, too. Another plate and knife, Matty. This is a little boy—a friend—not exactly a friend, but a—a thingumy, you know."

"No, I *don't* know, Emelina, what is the precise 'thingumy' you refer to this time," said the uncompromising and matter-of-fact Miss Deemas.

"You're *so* particular, dear Julia," replied Miss Tippet with a little sigh; "a what's-'is-n–, a *protégé*, you know."

"Indeed," said Miss Deemas, regarding Willie with a severe frown, as if in her estimation all *protégés* were necessarily villains.

"Yes, dear Julia, and, would you believe it, that this boy's brother-in-law—"

"Brother, ma'am," interrupted Willie.

"Yes, brother, actually saved my darling's life last night, at the—the thing in Beverly Square."

"What 'darling's life,' and what 'thing' in Beverly Square?" demanded Miss Deemas.

"What! have you not heard of the fire last night in Beverly Square—my relative, James Auberly—living there with his family—all burnt to ashes—and my sweet Loo, too? A what's-'is-name was brought, and a brave fireman went up it, through fire and water and smoke. Young Auberly went up before him and fell—heat and suffocation—and saved her in his arms, and his name is Frank, and he's this boy's brother-in-law!"

To this brief summary, given with much excitement, Miss Deemas listened with quiet composure, and then said with grim sarcasm, and very slowly:

"Let me see; there was a fire in Beverly Square last night, and James Auberly, living there with his family, were all burned to ashes."

Miss Tippet here interrupted with, "No, no;" but her stern friend imposing silence, with an eagle look, continued:

"All burned to ashes, and also your sweet Loo. A 'what's-his-name' having been brought, a brave fireman goes up it, and apparently never comes down again (burned to ashes also, I fancy); but young Auberly, who went up before him, and fell—heat and suffocation being the result—saved some one named 'her' in his arms; his name being Frank (owing no doubt to his having been re-baptised, for ever since I knew him he has been named Frederick), and he is this boy's brother-in-law!"

By way of putting an extremely fine point on her sarcasm, Miss Deemas turned to Willie, with a very condescending air, and said:

"Pray, when did your sister marry Mr Frederick Auberly?"

Willie, with a face of meekness, that can only be likened to that of a young turtle-dove, replied:

"Please, ma'am, it isn't my sister as has married Mr Auberly; but it's my brother, Frank Willders, as hopes to marry Miss Loo Auberly, on account o' havin' saved her life, w'en she comes of age, ma'am."

Miss Deemas stood aghast, or rather sat aghast, on receiving this reply, and scanned Willie's face with one of her most eagle glances; but that small piece of impudence wore an expression of weak good-nature, and winked its eyes with the humility of a subdued pup, while Miss Tippet looked half-horrified and half-amused; Matty grinned, and Emma squeaked through her nose.

"Boy," said Miss Deemas severely, "your looks belie you."

"Yes, ma'am," answered Willie, "my mother always said I wasn't half so bad as I looked; and she's aware that I'm absent from home."

At this point Willie allowed a gleam of intelligence to shoot across his face, and he winked to Emma, who thereupon went into private convulsions in her handkerchief.

"Emelina," said Miss Deemas solemnly, "let me warn you against that boy. He is a bad specimen of a bad sex. He is a precocious type of that base, domineering, proud and perfidious creature that calls itself 'lord of creation,' and which, in virtue of its superior physical power, takes up every position in life worth having," ("except that of wife and mother," meekly suggested Miss Tippet), "*worth having*" (repeated the eagle sternly, as if the position of wife and mother were *not* worth having), "worth having, and leaves nothing for poor weak-bodied, though not weak-minded woman to do, except sew and teach brats. Bah! I hate men, and they hate *me*, I know it, and I would not have it otherwise. I wish they had never been made. I wish there had been none in the world but women. What a blessed world it would have been *then*!"

Miss Deemas hit the table with her hand, in a masculine manner, so forcibly, that the plates and glasses rattled, then she resumed, for she was now on a favourite theme, and was delivering a lecture to a select audience.

"But, mark you, *I'm* not going to be put down by men. I mean to fight 'em with their own weapons. I mean to—"

She paused suddenly at this point, and, descending from her platform, advised Miss Tippet to dismiss the boy at once.

Poor Miss Tippet prepared to do so. She was completely under the power of Miss Deemas, whom, strange to say, she loved dearly. She really believed that they agreed with each other on most points, although it was quite evident that they were utterly opposed to each other in everything. Wherein the bond lay no philosopher could discover. Possibly it lay in the fact that they were absolute extremes, and, in verification of the proverb, had met.

Be this as it may, a note was quickly written to her brother, Thomas Tippet, Esquire, which was delivered to Willie, with orders to take it the following evening to London Bridge, in the neighbourhood of which Mr Tippet dwelt and carried on his business.

Chapter Eight.

A Hidden Fire.

In the afternoon of the following day Willie set off to the City in quest of Mr Thomas Tippet. Having to pass the King Street fire station, he resolved to look in on his brother.

The folding-doors of the engine-house were wide open, and the engine itself, clean and business-like, with its brass-work polished bright, stood ready for instant action. Two of the firemen were conversing at the open door, while several others could be seen lounging about inside. In one of the former Willie recognised the strong man who had collared him on a well-remembered occasion.

"Please, sir," said Willie, going up to him, "is Frank Willders inside?"

"Why, youngster," said Dale, laying his hand on Willie's head, "ain't you the boy that pulled our bell for a lark the other night?"

"Yes, sir, I am; but you let me off, you know, so I hope you won't bear me ill-will *now*."

"That depends on how you behave in future," said Dale with a laugh; "but what d'you want with Frank Willders?"

"I want to see him. He's my brother."

"Oh, indeed! You'll find him inside."

Willie entered the place with feelings of interest, for his respect for firemen had increased greatly since he had witnessed their recent doings at the Beverly Square fire.

He found his brother writing at the little desk that stood in the window, while five or six of his comrades were chatting by the fire, and a group in a corner were playing draughts, and spinning yarns of their old experiences. All assisted in loading the air with tobacco-smoke.

The round cloth caps worn by the men gave them a much more sailor-like and much less fireman-like appearance than the helmets, which, with their respective hatchets, hung on the walls, rendering the apartment somewhat like a cavalry guard-room. This change in the head-piece, and the removal of the hatchet, was the only alteration in their costume in what may be styled "times of peace." In other respects they were at all times accoutred, and in readiness to commence instant battle with the flames.

"Hallo, Blazes! how are ye?" said Willie, touching his brother on the shoulder.

"That you, Willie?" said Frank, without looking up from his work. "Where away now?"

"Come to tell ye there's a *fire*," said Willie, with a serious look.

"Eh? what d'ye mean?" asked Frank, looking at his brother, as if he half believed he was in earnest.

"I mean what I say—a fire here," said Willie, solemnly striking his breast with his clenched fist, "here in Heart Street, Buzzum Square, ragin' like fury, and all the ingins o' the fire brigade, includin' the float, couldn't put it out, no, nor even so much as squeanch it!"

"Then it's of no use our turning out, I suppose?" said Frank with a smile, as he wiped his pen; "what set it alight, lad?"

"A wax doll with flaxen hair and blue eyes," answered Willie; "them's the things as has all along done for me. When I was a boy I falled in love with a noo wax doll every other day. Not that I ever owned one myself; I only took a squint at 'em in toy-shop winders, and they always had flaxen hair and blue peepers. Now that I've become a man, I've bin an' falled in love with a livin' wax doll, an' she's got flaxen hair an' blue eyes; moreover, she draws."

"Draws—boy! what does she draw—corks?" inquires Frank.

"*No*!" replied Willie, with a look of supreme contempt; "nothin' so low; she draws faces an' pictures like—like—a schoolmaster, and," added Willie, with a sigh, "she's bin an' drawed all the spirit out o' this here buzzum."

"She must have left a good lot o' combustible matter behind, however, if there's such a fire raging in it. Who may this pretty fire-raiser be?"

"Her name is Emma Ward, and she b'longs to a Miss Tippet, to whom she's related somehow, but I don't know where she got her, nor who's her parents. This same Miss Tippet is some sort of a relation o' Mr Auberly, who sent me to her with a note, and she has sent me with another note to her brother near London Bridge, who, I s'pose, will send me with another note to somebody else, so I'm on my way down to see him. I thought I'd look in to ask after you in passin', and cheer you on to dooty."

A violent fit of somewhat noisy coughing from one of the men at the fireplace attracted Willie's attention at this point in the conversation.

"Wot a noisy feller you are, Corney," remarked one of the men.

"Faix," retorted Corney, "it's noisy you'd be too av ye had the cowld in yer chist that I have. Sure, if ye had bin out five times in wan night as I wos on Widsenday last, wid the branch to howld in a smoke as 'ud choke Baxmore hisself (an' it's well known *he* can stand a'most anything), not to spake o' the hose bu'stin' right betune me two feet."

"Come, come, Paddy," said Dale, interrupting; "don't try to choke us, now; you know very well that one of the fires was only a cut-away affair; two were chimneys, and one was a false alarm."

"True for ye!" cried Corney, who had a tendency to become irascible in argument, or while defending himself; "true for ye, Mister Dale, but they *was* alarms for all that, false or thrue, was they not now? Anyhow they alarmed me out o' me bed five times in a night as cowld as the polar ragions, and the last time was a raale case o' two flats burnt out, an' four hours' work in iced wather."

There was a general laugh at this point, followed by several coughs and sneezes, for the men were all more or less afflicted with colds, owing to the severity of the weather and the frequency of the fires that had occurred at that time.

"There's some of us can sing chorus to Corney," observed one of the group. "I never saw such weather; and it seems to me that the worse the weather the more the fires, as if they got 'em up a purpose to kill us."

"Bill Moxey!" cried another, "you're *always* givin' out some truism with a face like Solomon."

"Well, Jack Williams," retorted Moxey, "it's more than I can say of you, for you never say anything worth listenin' to, and you couldn't look like Solomon if you was to try ever so much.—You're too stoopid for that."

"I say, lads," cried Frank Willders, "what d'ye say to send along to the doctor for another bottle o' cough mixture, same as the first?"

This proposal was received with a general laugh.

"He'll not send us more o' *that* tipple, you may depend," said Williams.

"No, not av we wos dyin'," said Corney, with a grin.

"What was it?" asked Williams.

"Didn't you hear about it?" inquired Moxey. "Oh, to be sure not; you were in hospital after you got run over by the Baker Street engine. Tell him about it, Corney. It was you that asked the doctor, wasn't it, for another bottle?"

Corney was about to speak, when a young fireman entered the room with his helmet hanging on his arm.

"Is it go on?" he inquired, looking round.

"No, it's go back, young Rags," replied Baxmore, as he refilled his pipe; "it was only a chimney, so you're not wanted."

"Can any o' you fellers lend me a bit o' baccy?" asked Rags. "I've forgot to fetch mine."

"Here you are," said Dale, offering him a piece of twist.

"Han't ye got a bit o' hard baccy for the tooth?" said Rags.

"Will that do?" asked Frank Willders, cutting off a piece from a plug of cavendish.

"Thank'ee. Good afternoon."

Young Rags put the quid in his cheek, and went away humming a tune.

In explanation of the above incident, it is necessary to tell the reader that when a fire occurred in any part of London at the time of which we write, the fire-station nearest to it at once sent out its engines and men, and telegraphed to the then head or centre station at Watling Street. London was divided into four districts, each district containing several fire stations, and being presided over by a foreman. From Watling Street the news was telegraphed to the foremen's stations, whence it was transmitted to the stations of their respective districts, so that in a few minutes after the breaking out of a fire the fact was known to the firemen *all over London*.

As we have said, the stations nearest to the scene of conflagration turned out engines and men; but the other stations furnished a man each. Thus machinery was set in motion which moved, as it were, the whole metropolis; and while the engines were going to the fire at full speed, single men were setting out from every point of the compass to walk to it, with their sailors' caps on their heads and their helmets on their arms.

And this took place in the case of every alarm of fire, because fire is an element that will not brook delay, and it does not do to wait to ascertain whether it is worth while to turn out such a force of men for it or not.

In order, however, to prevent this unnecessary assembling of men when the fire was found to be trifling, or when, as was sometimes the case, it was a false alarm, the fireman in charge of the engine that arrived first, at once sent a man back to the station with a "stop," that is, with an order to telegraph to the central station that the fire turns out to be only a chimney or a false alarm, and that all hands

who have started from the distant stations may be "stopped." The "stop" was at once telegraphed to the foremen, from whom it was passed (just as the "call" had been) to the outlying stations, and this second telegram might arrive within quarter of an hour of the first.

Of course the man from each station had set out before that time, and the "stop" was too late for *him*, but it was his duty to call at the various fire stations he happened to pass on the way, where he soon found out whether he was to "go on" or to "go back."

If no telegram had been received, he went on to the fire; sometimes walking four or five miles to it, "at not less than four miles an hour." On coming up to the scene of conflagration, he put on his helmet, thrust his cap into the breast of his coat, and reported himself to the chief of the fire brigade (who was usually on the spot), or to the foreman in command, and found, probably, that he had arrived just in time to be of great service in the way of relieving the men who first attacked the flames.

If, on the other hand, he found that the "stop" had been telegraphed, he turned back before having gone much more than a mile from his own station, and so went quietly home to bed. In the days of which we write the effective and beautiful system of telegraphy which now exists had not been applied to the fire stations of London, and the system of "stops" and "calls," although in operation, was carried out much less promptly and effectively by means of messengers.

Some time before the entrance of Willie Willders into the King Street station the engine had been turned out to a fire close at hand, which proved to be only a chimney on fire, and which was put out by means of a hand-pump and a bucket of water, while Moxey was sent back with the "stop" to the station. The affair was over and almost forgotten, and the men had resumed their pipes, as we have seen, when young Rags entered and was told to go back.

Apologising for this necessary digression, we return to Joe Corney.

"The fact was," said he, "that we had had a fearful time of it that winter—blowin' great guns an' snow nearly every night, an' what wi' heat at the fires an' cowld i' the streets, an' hot wather pourin' on us at wan minnit an' freezin' on us the nixt, a'most every man Jack of us was coughin' an' sneezin', and watherin' so bad at our eyes an'

noses, that I do belave if we'd held 'em over the suction-pipes we might ha' filled the ingins without throublin' the mains at all. So the doctor he said, says he, 'Lads, I'll send ye a bottle o' stuff as'll put ye right.' An' sure enough down comes the bottle that night when we was smokin' our pipes just afther roll-call. It turned out to be the best midcine ever was. 'Musha!' says I, 'here's the top o' the marnin' to ye, boys!' Baxmore he smacks his lips when he tastes it, opens his eyes, tosses off the glass, and holds it out for another. 'Howld on; fair play!' cried Jack Williams, so we all had a glass round. It was just like lemonade or ginger-beer, it was. So we sat down an' smoked our pipes over it, an' spun yarns an' sung songs; in fact we made a jollification of it, an' when we got up to turn in there warn't a dhrop left i' the bottle.

"'You'd better go to the doctor for another bottle,' says Moxey, as he wint out.

"'I will,' says I; 'I'll go i' the marnin'.'

"Sure enough away I goes i' the marnin' to Doctor Offley. 'Doctor,' says I, howldin' out the bottle, 'we all think our colds are much the better o' this here midcine, an' I comed, av ye plaze, for another o' the same.'

"Musha! but ye should ha' seen the rage he goes off into. 'Finished it all?' says he. 'Ivery dhrop, doctor,' says I, 'at wan sittin'.' At that he stamped an' swore at me, an' ordered me away as if I'd bin a poor relation; an' says he, 'I'll sind ye a bottle to-night as'll cure ye!' Sure so he did. The second bottle would have poison'd a rat. It lasted us all six months, an' I do belave ye'll find the most of it in the cupboard at this minnit av ye look."

"Come, Willie," said Frank, while the men were laughing at the remembrance of this incident. "I'm going down your way and will give you a convoy. We can take a look in at the gymnastics as we pass, if you choose."

"All right, Blazes, come along." So saying they left the station, and set off at a brisk pace in the direction of the City.

Chapter Nine.

Auctions and Gymnastics.

As the brothers drew near to the busy region of the City which lies to the north of London Bridge; Frank turned aside into one of the narrow streets that diverge from the main thoroughfare.

"Where are ye goin'?" inquired Willie.

"There was a fire here last night," said Frank; "I want to have a look at the damage."

"A fire!" exclaimed Willie. "Why, Blazes, it strikes me there's bin more fires than usual last night in London."

"Only two, lad."

"*Only* two! How many would you have?" asked Willie with a laugh.

"Don't you know," said Frank, "that we have about four fires *every* night? Sometimes more, sometimes fewer. Of course, we don't *all* of us turn out to them; but some of the brigade turn out to that number, on an average, every night of the year."

"Are ye jokin', Frank?"

"Indeed I am not. I wish with all my heart I could say that I was joking. It's a fact, boy. You know I have not been long in the force, yet I've gone to as many as six fires in one night, and we *often* go to two or three. The one we are going to see the remains of just now was too far from us for our engine to turn out; but we got the call to send a man on, and I was sent. When I arrived and reported myself to Mr Braidwood, the two top floors were burnt out, and the fire was nearly got under. There were three engines, and the men were up on the window-sills of the second-floor with the branches, playin' on the last of the flames, while the men of the salvage-corps were getting the furniture out of the first floor. Conductor Brown was there with his escape, and had saved a whole family from the top floor, just before I arrived. He had been changed from his old station at the West End that very day. He's a wonderful fellow, that

conductor! Many a life he has saved; but, indeed, the same may be said of most of the men in the force, especially the old hands. Here we are, lad. This is the house."

Frank stopped, as he spoke, in front of a ruined tenement, or rather, in front of the gap which was now strewn with the charred and blackened *débris* of what had once been a house. The street in which it stood was a narrow, mean one, inhabited by a poor, and, to judge from appearance, a dissipated class. The remains of the house were guarded by policemen, while a gang of men were engaged in digging among the ruins, which still smoked a little here and there.

"What are they diggin' for?" asked Willie.

"I fear they are looking for dead bodies. The house was let out to lodgers, and swarmed with people. At first it was thought that all were saved; but just before I was ordered home after the fire was got under, some one said that an old man and his grandchild were missing. I suppose they're looking for them now."

On inquiring of a policeman, however, Frank learned that the remains of the old man and his grandchild had already been found, and that they were searching for the bodies of others who were missing. A little beyond the spot where the fire had occurred, a crowd was gathered round a man who stood on a chair haranguing them, with apparently considerable effect, for ever and anon his observations were received with cries of "Hear, hear," and laughter. Going along the middle of the narrow street, in order to avoid the smell of the old-clothes'-shops and pawnbrokers, as well as the risk of contact with their wares, Frank and Willie elbowed their way through the crowd to within a few yards of the speaker.

"What is he?" inquired Frank of a rather dissipated elderly woman.

"He's a clown or a hacrobat, or somethink of that sort, in one of the theatres or music-'alls. He's bin burnt out o' his 'ome last night, an's a-sellin' off all he's been able to save, by hauction."

"Come; now, ladies an' gents," cried the clown, taking up a rather seedy-looking great-coat, which he held aloft with one hand, and pointed to it with the other, "Who's agoin' to bid for this 'ere garment—a hextra superfine, double-drilled, kershimere great-coat,

fresh from the looms o' Tuskany—at least it was fresh from 'em ten years ago (that was when my grandfather was made Lord Mayor of London), an' its bin renewing its youth (the coat, not the Lord Mayor) ever since. It's more glossy, I do assure you, ladies and gents, than w'en it fust comed from the looms, by reason of the pile havin' worn off; and you'll obsarve that the glossiness is most beautiful and brightest about the elbows an' the seams o' the back. Who bids for this 'ere venerable garment? Six bob? Come now, don't all bid at once. Who said six bob?"

No reply being made to this, except a laugh, the clown (who, by the way, wore a similarly glossy great-coat, with a hat to match) protested that his ears must have deceived him, or his imagination had been whispering hopeful things—which was not unlikely, for his imagination was a very powerful one—when he noticed Frank's tall figure among the crowd.

"Come now, fireman, this is the wery harticle you wants. You comed out to buy it, I know, an' 'ere it is, by a strange coincidence, ready-made to hand. What d'ye bid? Six bob? Or say five. I know you've got a wife an' a large family o' young firemen to keep, so I'll let it go cheap. P'raps it's too small for you; but that's easy put right. You've only got to slit it up behind to the neck, which is a' infallible cure for a tight fit, an' you can let down the cuffs, which is double, an' if it's short you can cut off the collar, an' sew it on to the skirts. It's water-proof, too, and fire-proof, patent asbestos. W'en it's dirty you've got nothin' to do but walk into the fire, an' it'll come out noo. W'en it's thoroughly wet on the houtside, turn it hinside hout, an' there you are, to all appearance as dry as bone. What! you won't have it at no price? Well, now, I'll tempt you. I'll make it *two* bob."

"Say one," cried a baker, who had been listening to this, with a broad grin on his floury countenance.

"Ladies and gents," cried the clown, drawing himself up with dignity; "there's an individual in this crowd—I beg parden, this assemblage—as asks me to say 'one.' I *do* say 'one,' an' I say it with melancholy feelin's as to the liberality of my species. One bob! A feller-man as has bin burnt hout of 'is 'ome an' needs ready money to keep 'im from starvation, offers his best great-coat—a hextra superfine, double-drilled (or milled, I forget w'ich) kershimere, from the looms o' Tuskany—for one bob!"

"One-an'-six," muttered an old-clothes-man, with a black cotton sack on his shoulder.

"One-an'-six," echoed the clown with animation; "one-an'-six bid; one-an'-six. Who said one-an'-seven? Was it the gent with the red nose?—No, one-an'-six; goin' at the ridiculously low figure of one-an'-six—gone! as the old 'ooman said w'en her cat died o' apple-plexy. Here you are; hand over the money. I can't knock it down to you, 'cause I haven't a hauctioneer's 'ammer. Besides, it's agin' my principles. I've never knocked nothin' down, not even a skittle, since I joined the Peace Society.

"Now, ladies an' gents, the next thing I've got to hoffer is a harm-chair. Hand up the harmchair, Jim."

A very antique piece of furniture was handed up by a little boy, whom Willie recognised as the little boy who had once conversed with him in front of the chocolate-shop in Holborn Hill.

"Thank you, my son," said the clown, taking the chair with one hand and patting the boy's head with the other; "this, ladies and gents," he added in a parenthetical tone, "is my son; *he's* bin burnt hout of 'ouse an' 'ome, too! Now, then, who bids for the old harm-chair? the wery identical harm-chair that the song was written about. In the embrace o' this 'ere chair has sat for generations past the family o' the Cattleys—that's *my* name, ladies an gents, at your service. Here sat my great-great-grandfather, who was used to say that his great-grandfather sat in it too. Here sat his son, and his son's son—the Lord Mayor as was—and his son, my father, ladies and gents, who died in it besides, and whose son now hoffers it to the 'ighest bidder. You'll observe its antiquity, ladies an' gents. That's its beauty. It's what I may call, in the language of the haristocracy, a harticle of *virtoo*, w'ich means that it's a harticle as is surrounded by virtuous memories in connection with the defunct. Now then, say five bob for the hold harm-chair!"

While the clown was endeavouring to get the chair disposed of, Willie pushed his way to the side of Jim Cattley.

"I say, youngster, would you like a cup o' chocolate?" began Willie by way of recalling to the boy their former meeting.

Jim, whose face wore a sad and dispirited look, turned angrily and said, "Come, I don't want none o' your sauce!"

"It ain't sauce I'm talkin' of, it's chocolate," retorted Willie. "But come, Jim, I don't want to bother ye. I'm sorry to see you an yer dad in sitch a fix. Have you lost much?"

"It's not what we've lost that troubles us," said Jim, softened by Willie's sympathetic tone more than by his words; "but sister Ziza is took bad, an' she's a fairy at Drury Lane, an' takin' her down the fire-escape has well-nigh killed her, an' we've got sitch a cold damp cellar of a place to put her in, that I don't think she'll get better at all; anyhow, she'll lose her engagement, for she can't make two speeches an' go up in a silver cloud among blue fire with the 'flooenzer, an 'er 'air all but singed off 'er 'ead."

Jim almost whimpered at this point, and Willie, quitting his side abruptly, went back to Frank (who was still standing an amused auditor of the clown), and demanded a shilling.

"What for, lad?"

"Never you mind, Blazes; but give me the bob, an' I'll pay you back before the week's out."

Frank gave him a shilling, with which he at once returned to Jim, and thrusting it into his hand, said:

"There, Jim, your dad's hard up just now. Go you an' get physic with that for the fairy. Them 'floo-enzers is ticklish things to play with. Where d'ye stop?"

"Well, you *are* a queer 'un; thank'ee all the same," said Jim, pocketing the shilling. "We've got a sort o' cellar just two doors east o' the burnt 'ouse. Why?"

"'Cause I'll come an' see you, Jim. I'd like to see a live fairy in plain clo'se, with her wings off—"

The rest of the sentence was cut short by the clown, who, having disposed of the old arm-chair to a chimney-sweep, ordered Jim to "'and up another harticle." At the same moment Frank touched

Willie on the shoulder, and said, "Let's go, lad; I'll be late, I fear, for the gymnastics."

At the period of which we write, the then Chief of the London Fire Brigade, Mr Braidwood, had introduced a system of gymnastic training among the firemen, which he had found from experience to be a most useful exercise to fit the men for the arduous work they had to perform. Before going to London to take command of and reorganise the brigade which then went by the name of the London Fire-Engine Establishment, and was in a very unsatisfactory condition, Mr Braidwood had, for a long period, been chief of the Edinburgh Fire Brigade, which he had brought to a state of great efficiency. Taking the requirements and conditions of the service in Edinburgh into consideration, he had come to the conclusion that the best men for the work in that city were masons, house-carpenters, slaters, and suchlike; but these men, when at their ordinary employments, being accustomed to bring only certain muscles into full play, were found to have a degree of stiffness in their general movements which prevented them from performing their duty as firemen with that ease and celerity which are so desirable. To obviate this evil he instituted the gymnastic exercises, which, by bringing all the muscles of the body into action, and by increasing the development of the frame generally, rendered the men lithe and supple, and in every way more fitted for the performance of duties in which their lives frequently depended on their promptitude and vigour.

In addition to these advantages, it was found that those exercises gave the men confidence when placed in certain situations of danger. "For example," writes Mr Braidwood, "a fireman untrained in gymnastics, on the third or fourth floor of a burning house, with the branch in his hands, who is uncertain as to his means of escape, in the event of his return by the stair being cut off, will be too much concerned about his own safety to render much service, and will certainly not be half so efficient as the experienced gymnast, who, with a hatchet and eighty feet of rope at his waist, and a window near him, feels himself in comparative security, knowing that he has the means and the power of lowering himself easily and safely into the street"—a knowledge which not only gives him confidence, but enables him to give his undistracted attention to the exigencies of the fire.

It was to attend this gymnastic class that Frank now turned aside, and proposed to bid Willie goodbye; but Willie begged to be taken into the room. Frank complied, and the boy soon found himself in an apartment fitted up with all the appliances of a gymnasium, where a number of powerful young men were leaping, vaulting, climbing, and in other ways improving their physical powers. Frank joined them, and for a long time Willie stood in rapt and envious contemplation of the busy scene.

At first he could not avoid feeling that there seemed a good deal more of play than business in their doings; but his admiration of the scene deepened when he remembered the bold acts of the firemen at Beverly Square, and recognised some of the faces of the men who had been on duty there, and reflected that these very men, *who seemed thus to be playing themselves*, would on that very night, in all probability, be called upon to exert these powers sternly and seriously, yet coolly, in the midst of scenes of terror and confusion, and in the face of imminent personal danger.

Brooding over these things, Willie, having at length torn himself away, hastened on his pilgrimage to London Bridge.

Chapter Ten.

Difficulties and Dissipations.

In a very small office, situate in a very large warehouse, in that great storehouse of the world's wealth, Tooley Street, sat a clerk named Edward Hooper.

Among his familiar friends Edward was better known by the name of Ned.

He was seated on the top of a tall three-legged stool, which, to judge from the uneasy and restless motions of its occupant, must have been a peculiarly uncomfortable seat indeed.

There was a clock on the wall just opposite to Ned's desk, which that young gentleman was in the habit of consulting frequently—very frequently—and comparing with his watch, as if he doubted its veracity. This was very unreasonable, for he always found that the two timepieces told the truth; at least, that they agreed with each other. Nevertheless, in his own private heart, Ned Hooper thought that clock—and sometimes called it—"the slowest piece of ancient furniture he had ever seen."

During one of Ned's comparisons of the two timepieces the door opened, and Mr Auberly entered, with a dark cloud, figuratively speaking, on his brow.

At the same moment the door of an inner office opened, and Mr Auberly's head clerk, who had seen his employer's approach through the dusty window, issued forth and bowed respectfully, with a touch of condolence in his air, as he referred with much regret to the fire at Beverly Square, and hoped that Miss Auberly was not much the worse of her late alarm.

"Well, she is not the better for it," said Mr Auberly; "but I hope she will be quite well soon. Indeed, the doctor assures me of this, if care is taken of her. I wish that was the only thing on my mind just now; but I am perplexed about another matter, Mr Quill. Are you alone?"

"Quite alone, sir," said Quill, throwing open the door of the inner office.

"I want to consult with you about Frederick," said Mr Auberly as he entered.

The door shut out the remainder of the consultation at this point, so Edward Hooper consulted the clock again and sighed.

If sighs could have delivered Hooper from his sorrows, there is no doubt that the accumulated millions of which he was delivered in that office, during the last five years, would have filled him with a species of semi-celestial bliss.

At last, the hands of the clock reached the hour, *the* hour that was wont to evoke Ned's last sigh and set him free; but it was an aggravating clock. Nothing would persuade it to hurry. It would not, for all the untold wealth contained in the great stores of Tooley Street, have abated the very last second of the last minute of the hour. On the contrary, it went through that second quite as slowly as all the others. Ned fancied it went much slower at that one on purpose; and then, with a sneaking parade of its intention to begin to strike, it gave a prolonged hiss, and did its duty, and nothing *but* its duty; by striking the hour at a pace so slow, that it recalled forcibly to Ned Hooper's imaginative mind, "the minute-gun at sea."

There was a preliminary warning given by that clock some time before the premonitory hiss. Between this harbinger of coming events, and the joyful sound which was felt to be "an age," Ned was wont to wipe his pen and arrange his papers. When the hiss began, he invariably closed his warehouse book and laid it in the desk, and had the desk locked before the first stroke of the hour. While the "minute-gun at sea" was going on, he changed his office-coat for a surtout, not perfectly new, and a white hat with a black band, the rim of which was not perfectly straight. So exact and methodical was Ned in these operations, that his hand usually fell on the door-latch as the last gun was fired by the aggravating clock. On occasions of unusual celerity he even managed to drown the last shot in the bang of the door, and went off with a sensation of triumph.

On the present occasion, however, Ned Hooper deemed it politic to be so busy, that he could not attend to the warnings of the timepiece.

He even sat on his stool a full quarter of an hour beyond the time of departure. At length, Mr Auberly issued forth.

"Mr Quill," said he, "my mind is made up, so it is useless to urge such considerations on me. Good-night."

Mr Quill, whose countenance was sad, looked as though he would willingly have urged the considerations referred to over again, and backed them up with a few more; but Mr Auberly's tone was peremptory, so he only opened the door, and bowed the great man out.

"You can go, Hooper," said Mr Quill, retiring slowly to the inner office, "I will lock up. Send the porter here."

This was a quite unnecessary permission. Quill, being a good-natured, easy-going man, never found fault with Ned Hooper, and Ned being a presumptuous young fellow, though good-humoured enough, never waited for Mr Quill's permission to go. He was already in the act of putting on the white hat; and, two seconds afterwards, was in the street wending his way homeward.

There was a tavern named the "Angel" at the corner of one of the streets off Tooley Street, which Edward Hooper had to pass every evening on his way home. Ned, we grieve to say, was fond of his beer; he always found it difficult to pass a tavern. Yet, curiously enough, he never found any difficulty in passing this tavern; probably because he always went in and slaked his thirst *before* passing it.

"Good evening, Mr Hooper," said the landlord, who was busy behind his counter serving a motley and disreputable crew.

Hooper nodded in reply, and said good evening to Mrs Butler, who attended to the customers at another part of the counter.

"Good evenin', sir. W'at'll you 'ave to-night, sir?"

"Pot o' the same, Mrs B," replied Ned.

This was the invariable question and reply, for Ned was a man of regularity and method in everything that affected his personal

comforts. Had he brought one-tenth of this regularity and method to bear on his business conduct, he would have been a better and a happier man.

The foaming pot was handed, and Ned conversed with Mrs Butler while he enjoyed it, and commenced his evening, which usually ended in semi-intoxication.

Meanwhile, Edward Hooper's "chum" and fellow-lodger sat in their mutual chamber awaiting him.

John Barret did not drink, but he smoked; and, while waiting for his companion, he solaced himself with a pipe. He was a fine manly fellow, very different from Ned; who, although strong of limb and manly enough, was slovenly in gait and dress, and bore unmistakable marks of dissipation about him.

"Very odd; he's later than usual," muttered Barret, as he glanced out at the window, and then at the tea-table, which, with the tea-service, and, indeed everything in the room, proved that the young men were by no means wealthy.

"He'll be taking an extra pot at the 'Angel,'" muttered John Barret, proceeding to re-light his pipe, while he shook his head gravely; "but he'll be here soon."

A foot on the stair caused Barret to believe that he was a true prophet; but the rapidity and firmness of the step quickly disabused him of that idea.

The door was flung open with a crash, and a hearty youth with glowing eyes strode in.

"Fred Auberly!" exclaimed Barret in surprise.

"Won't you welcome me?" demanded Fred.

"Welcome you? Of course I will, most heartily, old boy!" cried Barret, seizing his friend's hand and wringing it; "but if you burst in on a fellow unexpectedly in this fashion, and with such wild looks, why—"

"Well, well, don't explain, man; I hate explanations. I have come here for sympathy," said Fred Auberly, shutting the door and sitting down by the fire.

"Sympathy, Fred?"

"Ay, sympathy. When a man is in distress he naturally craves for sympathy, and he turns, also naturally, to those who can and will give it—not to *everybody*, John Barret—only to those who can feel *with* him as well as *for* him. I am in distress, John, and ever since you and I fought our first and last battle at Eton, I have found you a true sympathiser. So now, is your heart ready to receive the flood of my sorrows?"

Young Auberly said the latter part of this in a half-jesting tone, but he was evidently in earnest, so his friend replied by squeezing his hand warmly, and saying, "Let's hear about it, Fred," while he re-lighted his pipe.

"You have but a poor lodging here, John," said Auberly, looking round the room.

Barret turned on his friend a quick look of surprise, and then said, with a smile:

"Well, I admit that it is not *quite* equal to a certain mansion in Beverly Square that I wot of, but it's good enough for a poor clerk in an insurance office."

"You are right," continued Auberly; "it is *not* equal to that mansion, whose upper floors are at this moment a *chevaux-de-frise* of charcoal beams and rafters depicted on a dark sky, and whose lower floors are a fantastic compound of burned bricks and lime, broken boards, and blackened furniture."

"You don't mean to say there's been a fire?" exclaimed Barret.

"And *you* don't mean to tell me, do you, that a clerk in a fire insurance office does not know it?"

"I have been ill for two days," returned Barret, "and have not seen the papers; but I'm very sorry to hear of it; indeed I am. The house is insured, of course?"

"I believe it is," replied Fred carelessly; "but *that* is not what troubles me."

"No?" exclaimed his friend.

"No," replied the other. "If the house had not been insured my father has wealth enough in those abominably unpicturesque stores in Tooley Street to rebuild the whole of Beverly Square if it were burnt down. The fire costs me not a thought, although, by the way, it nearly cost me my life, in a vain attempt I made to rescue my poor dear sister Loo—"

"*Vain* attempt!" exclaimed Barret, with a look of concern.

"Ay, vain, as far as I was concerned; but a noble fireman—a fellow that would make a splendid model for Hercules in the Life Academy—sprang to the rescue after me and saved her. God bless him! Dear Loo has got a severe shake, but the doctors say that we have only to take good care of her, and she will do well. But to return to my woes. Listen, John, and you shall hear."

Fred Auberly paused, as though meditating how he should commence.

"You know," said he, "that I am my father's only son, and Loo his only daughter."

"Yes."

"Well, my father has disinherited me and left the whole of his fortune to Loo. As far as dear Loo is concerned I am glad; for myself I am sad, for it is awkward, to say the least of it, to have been brought up with unlimited command of pocket-money, and expectations of considerable wealth, and suddenly to find myself all but penniless, without a profession and without expectations, at the age of twenty-two."

He paused and looked at his friend, who sat in mute amazement.

"Failing Loo," continued Fred calmly, "my father's fortune goes to some distant relative."

"But why? wherefore?" exclaimed Barret.

"You shall hear," continued Auberly. "You are aware that ever since I was able to burn the end of a stick and draw faces on the nursery-door, I have had a wild, insatiable passion for drawing; and ever since the memorable day on which I was whipped by my father, and kissed, tearfully, by my beloved mother, for caricaturing our cook on the dining-room window with a diamond-ring, I have had an earnest, unextinguishable desire to become a—a painter, an artist, a dauber, a dirtier of canvas. D'ye understand?"

"Perfectly," said Barret.

"Well, my father has long been resolved, it seems, to make me a man of business, for which I have no turn whatever. You are aware that for many years I have dutifully slaved and toiled at these heavy books in our office—which have proved so heavy that they have nearly squeezed the soul out of me—and instead of coming to like them better (as I was led to believe I should), I have only come to hate them more. During all this time, too, I have been studying painting late and early, and although I have not gone through the regular academical course, I have studied much in the best of all schools, that of Nature. I have urged upon my father repeatedly and respectfully, that it is possible for me to uphold the credit of the family as a painter; that, as the business can be carried on by subordinates, there is no necessity for me to be at the head of it; and that, as he has made an ample fortune already, the half of which he had told me was to be mine, I would be quite satisfied with my share, and did not want any more. But my father would never listen to my arguments. The last time we got on the subject he called me a mean-spirited fellow, and said he was sorry I had ever been born; whereupon I expressed regret that he had not been blessed with a more congenial and satisfactory son, and tried to point out that it was impossible to change my nature. Then I urged all the old arguments over again, and wound up by saying that even if I were to become possessor of the whole of his business to-morrow, I would sell it off, take to painting as a profession, and become the patron of aspiring young painters from that date forward!

"To my surprise and consternation, this last remark put him in such a towering rage, that he vowed he would disinherit me, if I did not then and there throw my palette and brushes into the fire. Of course, I declined to do such an act, whereupon he dismissed me from his presence for ever. This occurred on the morning of the day of the fire. I thought he might perhaps relent after such an evidence of the mutability of human affairs. I even ventured to remind him that Tooley Street was not made of asbestos, and that an *occasional* fire occurred there! But this made him worse than ever; so I went the length of saying that I would, at all events, in deference to his wishes, continue to go to the office at least for some time to come. But, alas! I had roused him to such a pitch that he refused to hear of it, unless I should '*throw my palette and brushes into the fire*!' Flesh and blood, you know, could not do that, so I left him, and walked off twenty miles into the country to relieve my feelings. There I fell in with *such* a splendid 'bit;' a sluice, with a stump of a tree, and a winding bit of water with overhanging willows, and a peep of country beyond! I sat down and sketched, and forgot my woes, and *rejoiced* in the fresh air and delightful sounds of birds, and cows, and sheep, and *hated* to think of Tooley Street. Then I slept in a country inn, walked back to London next day, and, *voilà*! here I am!"

"Don't you think, Fred, that time will soften your father?"

"No, I don't think it. On the contrary, I know it won't. He is a good man; but he has an iron will, which I never saw subdued."

"Then, my dear Fred, I advise you to consider the propriety of throwing your palette and brushes into—"

"My dear John, I did not come here for your advice. I came for your sympathy."

"And you have it, Fred," cried Barret earnestly. "But have you really such an unconquerable love for painting?"

"Have I really!" echoed Fred. "Do you think I would have come to such a pass as this for a trifle? Why, man, you have no idea how my soul longs for the life of a painter, for the free fresh air of the country, for the poetry of the woods, the water, and the sky, for the music of bird and beast and running brook. You know the true proverb, 'Man made the town; but God made the country!'"

"What," asked Barret, "would become of the town, if all men thought as you do?"

"Oh! John Barret, has town life so marred your once fine intellect, that you put such a question in earnest? Suppose I answer it by another: What would become of the country if all men thought and acted as you do?"

Barret smiled and smoked.

"And what," continued Auberly, "would become of the fine arts if all men delighted in dirt, dust, dullness, and desks? Depend upon it, John, that our tastes and tendencies are not the result of accident; they were given to us for a purpose. I hold it as an axiom that when a man or a boy has a strong and decided bias or partiality for any particular work that he knows *something* about, he has really a certain amount of capacity for that work beyond the average of men, and is led thereto by a higher power than that of man. Do not misunderstand me. I do not say that, when a boy expresses a longing desire to enter the navy or the army, he has necessarily an aptitude for these professions. Far from it. He has only a romantic notion of something about which, experimentally, he knows nothing; but, when man or boy has put his hand to any style of work, and *thereafter* loves it and longs after it, I hold that that is the work for which he was destined, and for which he is best suited."

"Perhaps you are right," said Barret, smoking harder than ever. "At all events, I heartily sympathise with you, and—"

At this point the conversation was interrupted by a loud burst of whistling, as the street-door opened and the strains of "Rule Britannia" filled the entire building. The music was interrupted by the sudden opening of another door, and a rough growl from a male voice.

"Don't get waxy, old feller," said the performer in a youthful voice, "I ain't a-goin' to charge you nothink for it. I always do my music gratis; havin' a bee-nevolient turn o' mind."

The door was slammed violently, and "Rule Britannia" immediately burst forth with renewed and pointed emphasis.

Presently it ceased, and a knock came to Barret's door.

"Well, what d'ye want, you noisy scamp?" said Barret, flinging the door open, and revealing the small figure of Willie Willders.

"Please, sir," said Willie, consulting the back of a note; "are you Mister T–Tom—Tupper, Esquire?"

"No, I'm not."

"Ain't there sitch a name in the house?"

"No, not that I know of."

Willie's face looked blank.

"Well, I was told he lived here," he muttered, again consulting the note.

"Here, let me look," said Barret, taking the note from the boy. "This is Tippet, not Tupper. He lives in the top floor. By the way, Auberly," said Barret, glancing over his shoulder, "Isn't Tom Tippet a sort of connection of yours?"

"Yes; a distant one," said Fred carelessly, "too distant to make it worth while our becoming acquainted. He's rich and eccentric, I'm told. Assuredly, he must be the latter if he lives in such a hole as this. What are you staring at, boy?"

This question was put to Willie.

"Please, sir, are *you* the Mr Auberly who was a'most skumfished with smoke at the Beverly Square fire t'other day, in tryin' to git hold o' yer sister?"

Fred could not but smile as he admitted the fact.

"Please, sir, I hope yer sister ain't the wuss of it, sir."

"Not much, I hope; thank you for inquiring; but how come you to know about the fire, and to be interested in my sister?"

"'Cause I was there, sir; an' it was *my brother*, sir, Frank Willders, as saved your sister."

"Was it, indeed!" exclaimed Fred, becoming suddenly interested. "Come, let me hear more about your brother."

Willie, nothing loth, related every fact he was acquainted with in regard to Frank's career, and his own family history, in the course of which he revealed the object of his visit to Mr Tippet. When he had finished, Frederick Auberly shook hands with him and said:

"Now, Willie, go and deliver your note. If the application is successful, well; but if it fails, or you don't like your work, just call upon me, and I'll see what can be done for you."

"Yes, sir, and thankee," said Willie; "where did you say I was to call, sir?"

"Call at—eh—ah—yes, my boy, call *here*, and let my friend Mr Barret know you want to see me. He will let me know, and you shall hear from me. Just at present—well, never mind, go and deliver your note now. Your brother is a noble fellow. Good-night. And you're a fine little fellow yourself," he added, after Willie closed the door.

The fine little fellow gave vent to such a gush of "Rule Britannia" at the moment, that the two friends turned with a smile to each other.

Just then a man's voice was heard at the foot of the stair, grumbling angrily. At the same moment young Auberly rose to leave.

"Good-night, Barret. I'll write to you soon as to my whereabout and what about. Perhaps see you ere long."

"Good-night. God prosper you, Fred. Good-night."

As he spoke, the grumbler came stumbling along the passage.

"Good-night again, Fred," said Barret, almost pushing his friend out. "I have a particular reason for not wishing you to see the fr–, the man who is coming in."

"All right, old fellow," said Fred as he passed out, and drew up against the wall to allow a drunken man to stumble heavily into the room.

Next moment he was in the street hastening he knew not whither; but following the old and well-known route to Beverly Square.

Chapter Eleven.

Wonderful Plans.

When Willie Willders knocked at Tom Tippet's door, at the top of the house, a rich jovial bass voice cried, "Come in." So Willie went in, and stood before a stout old gentleman, whose voluminous whiskers, meeting below his chin, made ample amends for the total absence of hair from the top of his head.

Mr Tippet stood, without coat or vest, and with his braces tied round his waist, at a carpenter's bench, holding a saw in his right hand, and a piece of wood in his left.

"Well, my lad, what's *your* business?" he inquired in the voice of a stentor, and with the beaming smile of an elderly cherub.

"Please, sir, a note—from a lady."

"I wish your message had been verbal, boy. It's so difficult to read ladies' hands; they're so abominably angular, and—where *are* my specs? I've a mind to have 'em screw-nailed to my nose. Ah! here they are."

He found them under a jack-plane and a mass of shavings; put them on and read the note, while Willie took the opportunity of observing that Mr Tippet's room was a drawing-room, parlour, dining-room, workshop, and old curiosity-shop, all in one. A half-open door revealed the fact that an inner chamber contained Mr Tippet's bed, and an indescribable mass of machinery and models in every stage of progression, and covered with dust, more or less thick in exact proportion to their respective ages. A dog and cat lay side by side on the hearth asleep, and a small fire burned in a grate, on the sides of which stood a variety of crucibles and such-like articles and a glue-pot; also a tea-pot and kettle.

"You want a situation in my office as a clerk?" inquired Mr Tippet, tearing up his sister's letter, and throwing it into the fire.

"If you please, sir," said Willie.

"Ha! are you good at writing and ciphering?"

"Middlin', sir."

"Hum! D'you know where my office is, and what it is?"

"No, sir."

"What would you say now," asked Mr Tippet, seating himself on his bench, or rather on the top of a number of gimblets and chisels and files and pincers that lay on it; "what would you say now to sitting from morning till night in a dusty ware-room, where the light is so feeble that it can scarcely penetrate the dirt that encrusts the windows, writing in books that are so greasy that the ink can hardly be got to mark the paper? How would you like that, William Willders—eh?"

"I don't know, sir," replied Willie, with a somewhat depressed look.

"Of course you don't, yet that is the sort of place you'd have to work in, boy, if I engaged you, for that is a correct description of my warehouse. I'm a sleeping partner in the firm. D'ye know what that is, boy?"

"No, sir."

"Well, it's a partner that does no work; but I'm wide-awake for all that, an' have a pretty good notion of what is going on there. Now, lad, if I were to take you in, what would you say to 5 pounds a year?"

"It don't sound much, sir," said Willie bluntly, "but if you take me in with the understandin' that I'm to work my way up'ards, I don't mind about the pay at first."

"Good," said Mr Tippet, with a nod of approval. "What d'ye think of my workshop?" he added, looking round with a cherubic smile.

"It's a funny place," responded Willie, with a grin.

"A funny place—eh? Well, I daresay it is, lad, in your eyes; but let me tell you, it is a place of deep interest, and, I may add without vanity, importance. There are inventions here, all in a state bordering more or less upon completion, which will, when brought into operation, modify the state of society very materially in many of its most prominent phases. Here, for instance, is a self-acting galvano-hydraulic engine, which will entirely supersede the use of steam, and, by preventing the consumption of coal now going on, will avert, or at least postpone, the decline of the British Empire. Able men have calculated that, in the course of a couple of hundred years or so, our coal-beds will be exhausted. I have gone over their calculations and detected several flaws in them, which, when corrected, show a very different result—namely, that in seventeen or eighteen years from this time there will not be an ounce of coal in the kingdom!"

Mr Tippet paused to observe the effect of this statement. Willie having never heard of such things before, and having a thoughtful and speculative as well as waggish turn of mind, listened with open eyes and mouth and earnest attention, so Mr Tippet went on:

"The frightful consequences of such a state of things you may conceive, or rather they are utterly inconceivable. Owing to the foundations of the earth having been cut away, it is more than probable that the present coal districts of the United Kingdom will collapse, the ocean will rush in, and several of our largest counties will become salt-water lakes. Besides this, coal being the grand source of our national wealth, its sudden failure will entail national bankruptcy. The barbarians of Europe, taking advantage of our condition, will pour down upon us, and the last spark of true civilisation in our miserable world will be extinguished—the last refuge for the hunted foot of persecuted Freedom will be finally swept from the face of the earth!"

Here Mr Tippet brought the saw down on the bench with such violence, that the dog and cat started incontinently to their legs, and Willie himself was somewhat shaken.

"Now," continued Mr Tippet, utterly regardless of the sensation he had created, and wiping the perspiration from his shining head with a handful of shavings; "now, William Willders, all this may be, *shall* be, prevented by the adoption of the galvano-hydraulic engine, and the consequent restriction of the application of coal to the legitimate

purposes of warming our dwellings and cooking our victuals. I mean to bring this matter before the Home Secretary whenever I have completed my invention, which, however, is not *quite* perfected.

"Then, again," continued Mr Tippet, becoming more and more enthusiastic as he observed the deep impression his explanations were making on Willie, who stood glaring at him in speechless amazement, "here you have my improved sausage-machine for converting all animal substances into excellent sausages. I hold that every animal substance is more or less good for food, and that it is a sad waste to throw away bones and hair, etcetera, etcetera, merely because these substances are unpalatable or difficult to chew. Now, my machine gets over this difficulty. You cut an animal up just as it is killed, and put it into the machine—hair, skin, bones, blood, and all—and set it in motion by turning on the galvano-hydraulic fluid. Delicious sausages are the result in about twenty minutes.

"You see my dog there—Chips I call him, because he dwells in the midst of chips and shavings; he sleeps upon chips, and if he does not exactly eat chips, he lives upon scraps which have a strong resemblance to them. The cat has no name. I am partial to the time-honoured name of 'Puss.' Besides, a cat is not worthy of a name. Physically speaking, it is only a bundle of living fur—a mere mass of soft animated nature, as Goldsmith would express it. Intellectually it is nothing—a sort of existent nonentity, a moral void on which a name would be utterly thrown away. Well, I could take these two animals, Chips and Puss, put them in here (alive, too, for there is a killing apparatus in the instrument which will effectually do away with the cruel process of slaughtering, and with its accompanying nuisances of slaughter-houses and butchers)—put them in here, I say, and in twenty minutes they would be ground up into sausages.

"I know that enemies to progress, ignorant persons and the like, will scoff at this, and say it is similar to the American machine, into one end of which you put a tree, and it comes out at the other end in the shape of ready-made furniture. But such scoffs will cease, while my invention will live. I am not bigoted, William. There may be good objections to my inventions, and great difficulties connected with them, but the objections I will answer, and the difficulties I will overcome.

"This instrument," continued Mr Tippet, pointing to a huge beam, which leant against the end of the small apartment, "is only a speculative effort of mine. It is meant to raise enormous weights, such as houses. I have long felt it to be most desirable that people should be able to raise their houses from their foundations by the strength of a few men, and convey them to other localities, either temporarily or permanently. I have not succeeded yet, but I see my way to success; and, after all, the idea is not new. You can see it partially carried out by an enterprising company in this city, whose enormous vans will remove the whole furniture of a drawing-room, almost as it stands, without packing. My chief difficulty is with the fulcrum; but that is a difficulty that met the philosopher of old. You have heard of Archimedes, William—the man who said he could make a lever big enough to move the world, if he could only get a fulcrum to rest it on. But Archimedes was weak in that point. He ought to have known that, even if he did get such a fulcrum, he would still have required another world as long as his lever, to enable him to walk out to the end of it. No, by the way, he might have walked *on* the lever itself! That did not occur to me before. He might even have ridden along it. Come, that's a new idea. Let me see."

In order the better to "see," Mr Tippet dropt the piece of wood from his left hand, and pressed his fingers into both eyes, so as to shut out all earthly objects, and enable him to take an undistracted survey of the chambers of his mind. Returning suddenly from the investigation, he exclaimed:

"Yes, William, I don't quite see my way to it; but I can perceive dimly the possibility of Archimedes having so formed his lever, that a line of rails might have been run along the upper side of it, from the fulcrum to the other end."

"Yes, sir," exclaimed Willie, who, having become excited, was entering eagerly into his patron's speculations, and venting an occasional remark in the height of his enthusiasm.

"Such a thing *might* be done," continued Mr Tippet emphatically; "a small carriage—on the galvano-hydraulic principle, of course—might run to and fro—"

"With passengers," suggested Willie.

"Well—with passengers," assented Mr Tippet, smiling. "Of course, the lever would be very large—extremely large. Yes, there *might* be passengers."

"An' stations along the line?" said Willie.

Mr Tippet knitted his brows.

"Ye–yes—why not?" he said slowly. "Of course, the lever would be very long, extremely long, and it might be necessary to stop the carriages on the way out. There might be breadth sufficient on the lever to plant small side stations."

"An' twenty minutes allowed for refreshments," suggested Willie.

"Why, as to that," said Mr Tippet, "if we stop at all, there could be no reasonable objection to refreshments, although it is probable we might find it difficult to get anyone sufficiently enterprising to undertake the supply of such a line; for, you know, if the lever were to slip at the fulcrum and fall—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Willie, "*wouldn't* there be a smash; neither!"

"The danger of people falling off, too," continued Mr Tippet, "might be prevented by railings run along the extreme edges of the lever."

"Yes," interrupted Willie, whose vivid imagination, unused to such excitement, had taken the bit in its teeth and run away with him; "an' spikes put on 'em to keep the little boys from swinging on 'em, an' gettin' into mischief. Oh! what jolly fun it would be. Only think! we'd advertise cheap excursion trains along the Arkimeedis Line, Mondays an' Toosdays. Fares, two hundred pounds, fust class. No seconds or parleys allowed for love or money. Starts from the Fuddlecrum Sta—"

"Fulcrum," said Mr Tippet, correcting.

"Fulcrum Station," resumed Willie, "at 2:30 a.m. of the mornin' precisely. Stops at the Quarter, Half-way, an' Three-quarter Stations, allowin' twenty minutes, more or less, for grub—weather permittin'."

"Your observations are quaint," said Mr Tippet, with a smile; "but there is a great deal of truth in them. No doubt, the connection of such ideas, especially as put by you, sounds a little ludicrous; but when we come to analyse them, we see their possibility, for, *if* a lever of the size indicated by the ancient philosopher were erected (and theoretically, the thing *is* possible), then the subordinate arrangements as to a line of railway and stations, etcetera, would be mere matters of detail. It might be advertised, too, that the balance of the lever would be so regulated, that, on the arrival of the train at the terminus, the world would rise (a fact which might be seen by the excursionists, by the aid of enormous telescopes, much better than by the people at home), and that, on the return of the train, the world would again sink to its ancient level.

"There would be considerable risk, no doubt," continued Mr Tippet meditatively, "of foolish young men and boys getting over the rails in sport or bravado, and falling off into the depths of illimitable profundity, but—"

"We could have bobbies stationed along the line," interrupted Willie, "an' tickets put up warnin' the passengers not to give 'em money on no account wotsomedever, on pain o' bein' charged double fare for the first offence, an' pitched over the rails into illimidibble pro-what's-'is-name for the second."

"I'll tell you what it is, William," said Mr Tippet suddenly, getting off the bench and seizing the boy's hand, "your talents would be wasted in my office. You'll come and assist me here in the workshop. I'm greatly in want of an intelligent lad who can use his hands; but, by the way, can you use your hands? Here, cut this piece of wood smooth, with that knife."

He handed Willie a piece of cross-grained wood and a blunt knife.

Willie looked at both, smiled, and shook his head.

"It would take a cleverer feller than me to do it; but I'll try."

Willie did try; after a quarter of an hour spent in vain attempts, he threw down the wood and knife exclaiming, "It's impossible."

Mr Tippet, who had been smiling cherubically, and nodding approval, said:

"I knew it was impossible, my lad, when I gave it to you, and I now know that you are both neat-handed and persevering; so, if you choose, I'll engage you on the spot to come on trial for a week. After that we will settle the remuneration. Meanwhile, shake hands again, and allow me to express to you my appreciation of the noble character of your brother, who, I understand from my sister's letter, saved a young relative of mine from the midst of imminent danger. Good-night, William, and come to me on Monday next, at nine o'clock in the morning."

Willie was somewhat perplexed at this prompt dismissal (for Mr Tippet had opened the door), especially after such a long and free-and-easy conversation, and he felt that, however much license Mr Tippet might permit, he was a man of stern will, who could not be resisted with impunity; so, although he was burning to know the object and nature of innumerable strange pieces of mechanism in the workshop, he felt constrained to make a polite bow and depart.

On his way downstairs, he heard the voices of men as if in angry disputation; and on reaching the next floor, found Mr Barret standing at the open door of his room, endeavouring to hold Ned Hooper, who was struggling violently.

"I tell you," said the latter, in a drunken voice, "that I w–will go out!"

"Come, Ned, not to-night; you can go to-morrow" said Barret soothingly, yet maintaining his hold of his friend.

"W–why not? ain't night the best time to—to—be jolly?—eh! L–me go, I shay."

He made a fierce struggle at this point; and Barret, ceasing to expostulate, seized him with a grasp that he could not resist, and dragged him forcibly, yet without unnecessary violence, into the room.

Next instant the door was shut with a bang and locked; so Willie Willders descended to the street, and turned his face homewards, moralising as he went on the evils of drink.

It was a long way to Notting Hill; but it was not long enough to enable Willie to regain his wonted nonchalance. He had seen and heard too much that night to permit of his equilibrium being restored. He pursed his mouth several times into the form of a round O, and began "Rule Britannia"; but the sounds invariably died at the part where the "charter of the land" is brought forward. He tried "The Bay of Biscay, O!" with no better success, never being able to get farther than "lightning's vivid powers," before his mind was up in the clouds, or in Mr Tippet's garret, or out on the Archimedes-Lever Railway.

Thus wandering in dreams he reached home, talked wildly to his anxious mother, and went to bed in a state of partial insanity.

Chapter Twelve.

A Little Domestic Chit-Chat.

One night, not long after the events narrated in the last chapter, Frank Willders was standing with the fireman-in-charge in the King Street Station. He had just removed his helmet, and the perspiration on his brow showed that he had been but recently engaged in some active duty; as indeed was the case, for he had just returned from a "walk" to a fire in Whitechapel.

"It was only a small affair," said Frank, hanging up his helmet and axe, and sitting down to fill his pipe; "a low beer-shop in Brook Street; the taproom burnt out, and the rest of the house damaged by smoke. It was pretty well over before I got there, and I left half an hour after. Where are the rest o' the lads?"

"They're out wi' both engines," said Baxmore, who was busy making a memorandum on a slate.

"With both engines!" said Frank.

"Ay, both," replied Baxmore, with a laugh, as he sat down in front of the fire. "Let me see; it's now nine o'clock, so they've bin off an hour; one to Walton Street, Brompton; the other to Porchester Terrace, Bayswater. The call was the queerest I've seen for many a day. We was all sittin' here smokin' our pipes, as usual, when two fellers came to the door, full split, from opposite pints o' the compass, an' run slap into each other. They looked like gentlemen; but they was in such a state it wasn't easy to make out what sort o' fish they was. One had his coat torn and his hat gone; the other had his tile pretty well knocked down on his eyes—I s'pose by the people he run into on the way—an' both were half-mad with excitement. They both stuttered, too—that was the fun o' the thing, and they seemed to think each was takin' off the other, and got into a most awful rage. My own opinion is, that one stuttered by nature, an' the other stuttered from fright. Anyhow, they both stuttered together, and a precious mess they made of it.

"'F–F–F–Fire!' roared one.

"'F–F–F–Fire!' yelled the other.

"'Where away?' asked Mr Dale, looking quietly at the two men, who were gasping for breath.

"'B–B–B–Brompton,' 'B–B–B–Bayswater!' they shouted together; and then, turnin' fiercely on each other, the one said 'N–N–N–No!' and the other said 'N–N–N–No!' 'Now, *which* is it?' said Dale, 'an' *be* quick—do.'

"'B–B–B–Brompton!'

"'B–B–B–Bayswater!' in a breath; then says one, 'I—I s–s–say *Brompton*!' an' the other, he says, 'I—I s–s–say *Bayswater*!'

"At this they grew furious, and Dale tried to calm them and settle the question by asking the name of the street.

"'W–W–Walton S–Street!' cried one.

"'P–P–P–Porchester T–T–Terrace!' shouted the other.

"'N–N–No!' 'Y–Y–Yes!' 'N–No!' an' with that, one up fist an' hit the other a crack between the eyes. T'other returned on the nob, and then they closed.

"Before this Mr Dale had ordered out one o' the engines, an' when he heard the two streets named it occurred to him that there might be *two* fires, so he ordered out the other engine; and before we got the stutterers separated both engines were off full swing, one to Brompton, the other to Bayswater; but whether there are two fires or no is yet to be seen."

Just as Baxmore concluded, the rattle of a returning engine was heard. Next moment it dashed up to the door, and the firemen, leaping off, streamed into the station, where; amid much comment and some laughter at the scene they had so recently witnessed, they hung up their helmets and crowded round the fire.

"So it *was* in Brompton, after all," said Jack Williams, stirring the coals; "but it was a small affair in a baker's shop, and we soon got it out."

"Is the other engine back?" inquired Moxey.

"Here she comes to answer for herself," said Mason, as the second engine dashed up to the station, and the men were joined by their comrades.

"We've got it out," said Dale, sitting down before the desk to enter the particulars in his diary; "it was a private house, and well alight when we got there, but the Paddington engine was playing on it, and we soon got it under."

"Faix, it's well them stutterers didn't kape us longer, else the whole house would have bin burnt out intirely," observed Joe Corney, binding up a slight wound in his thumb, which he had received from a splinter.

Most of the men were more or less begrimed with charcoal and smoke, and otherwise bore marks of their recent sharp though short skirmish, but none of them deemed it necessary to remove these evidences of devotion to duty until they had refreshed themselves with a pipe.

"Were there people in the house?" inquired Frank.

"Ay, but Pickford was there with the escape, an' got 'em all out before we came up," said one.

"Pickford said he couldn't help laughing after he got 'em out, at the remembrance o' their faces. When he first went in they was all sound asleep in the top floor, for the smoke was only beginnin' to show there, an' the surprise they got when he jump in among 'em an' shouted was wonderful to behold."

"Not so wonderful," observed Bill Moxey, "as the surprise I seed a whole man-o'-war's crew get by consequence o' the shout o' one of her own men."

"When was that? Let's hear about it, Bill," said Corney, stuffing down the tobacco in his pipe, and firing a battery of cloudlets into the air.

"We was in the Red Sea at the time," said Moxey, clearing his throat, "layin' at anchor, and a precious hot time we had of it. There was never a cloud a'most in the sky, and the sun was nigh hot enough to fry the decks off the ship. Cook said he'd half a mind to try to roast a junk o' beef at it, but I never heard that he managed that. We slep' on deck o' nights, 'cause you might as well have tried to sleep in a baker's oven as sleep below. The thing that troubled us most at that time was a tiger we had on board. It did kick up such a shindy sometimes! We thought it would break its cage an make a quid o' some of us. I forget who sent it to us—p'raps it was the Pasha of Egypt; anyhow we weren't sorry when the order was given to put the tiger ashore.

"Well, the same day that we got rid o' the tiger we was sent aboard a Malay ship to flog one o' the men. He'n bin up to some mischief, an' his comrades were afraid, I s'pose, to flog him; and as the offence he had committed was against us somehow (I never rightly understood it myself), some of us went aboard the Malay ship, tied him up, an' gave him two dozen.

"That night the whole ship's company slep' on deck as usual—officers as well—all but the cap'n, who had gone ashore. It was a *tremendous* hot night, an' a good deal darker than usual. There was one man in the ship named Wilson; but we called him Bob Roarer, because of a habit he had of speakin' an' sometimes roarin' in his sleep. Bob lay between me an' the purser that night, an' we slep' on all right till it was getting pretty late, though there was two or three snorers that got their noses close to the deck an' kep' up a pretty fair imitation of a brass band. Suddenly Bob began to dream, or took a nightmare or somethin', for he hit straight out with both fists, givin' the purser a tap on the nob with his left, an' diggin' his right into my bread-basket with such good will that he nearly knocked all the wind out o' me, at the same time he uttered a most appallin' yell.

"The confusion that followed is past description.

"Some of us thought it was the tiger had broke loose,—forgettin' that it had been sent ashore. Bob sneaked off the moment he found what

he'd done, and the purser, thinkin' it was pirates, grabbed the first he could lay hold of by the throat, and that was me, so to it we went tooth an' nail, for I had no notion who was pitchin' into me, it was so dark. Two of the men in their fright sprang up the main shrouds. Two others, who were asleep in the main-top, were awoke by the row, looked down on the starboard side, an' saw the two comin' up. Thinking it was the friends of the Malay who had been flogged coming to be revenged, they ran down the port shrouds like mad, and one o' them rushed along the port-deck, stickin' his feet into the bread-baskets of all the sleepers that hadn't been woke by the yell, rousin' them up an' causin' them to roar like bo'suns. The row woke the cook, who was a nigger; he, thinkin' it was a sudden jollification, seized one o' the coppers an' began to beat it with an iron spoon. This set up the quartermaster, who rushed along the starboard deck, trampin' upon the breasts and faces of all and sundry. The gunner thought it was the tiger, and took to the top of the awning; while the doctor and bo's'n's-mate they jumped over the side, and hung on by ropes up to their waists in water!

"At the worst o' the confusion the cap'n came aboard. We didn't see him, but he ordered silence, an' after a while we discovered that there was no reason whatever for the shindy. It wasn't till a long time afterwards that we found out the real cause of the false alarm; but the only man that got no fright that night, and kep' quite cool, was the man who set it all agoin'—Bob Roarer."

"*What* a feller you are, Bill, to talk blarney," said Corney, rising and knocking the ashes out of his pipe; "sure, aither yer father or yer mother must have bin an Irishman."

"Blarney or no blarney, them's the facts," said Moxey, yawning, "an' I'm off to bed."

"Ditto," said Frank, stretching himself.

The two tressels, which were always removed from the room during the day, had been brought in, and were by this time occupied by Mason and Williams, whose duty it was to keep watch that night. Baxmore, the sub-engineer of the station, sat down at the desk to read over the events of the day, and the others rose to leave.

"By the way, Baxmore," said Dale, "what was that false alarm at 2 p.m. when I was down at Watling Street?"

"Only a chemist in Kensington, who, it seems, is mad after makin' experiments, and all but blew the roof off his house with one of 'em."

"Ah! only smoke, I suppose," said Dale.

"That was all," said Baxmore, "but there was sitch a lot of it that some fellows thought it was a fire, an' came tearin' down here wi' the news, so we had a ride for nothing."

"If I'm not mistaken you'll have a ride for something ere long," observed Dale, turning his head aside, while he listened attentively. "Hold on, lads, a minute!"

There was a sound of wheels in the distance, as if some vehicle were approaching at a furious pace. On it came, louder and louder, until it turned the corner of the street, and the horses' feet rattled on the stones as they were pulled up sharp at the station. Instantly the bell was rung violently, and a severe kicking was bestowed on the door.

It is needless to say that the summons was answered promptly. Some of the men quietly resumed the helmets they had just hung up, well knowing that work lay before them.

A cabman darted through the door the instant it was opened, shouting—

"Fire!"

"Where?" asked Dale.

"Forth Street, Holborn, sir!" cried the cabman. Again, for the third time that night, the order was given to "get her out." While this was being done, Baxmore took a leathern purse from the cupboard, and gave the cabman a shilling for being first to "give the call."

As the men were already accoutred, the engine left the station on this occasion in less than five minutes. The distance was short, so the

pace was full speed, and in an incredibly short space of time they drew up in front of a large, handsome shop, from the first-floor windows of which thick smoke and a few forked flames were issuing.

Chapter Thirteen.

Wild Doings and Daring Deeds.

Quick though they were, however, in reaching the scene of the fire, the escape was there before them. It had a shorter way to travel, and was already pitched, with its head resting against a window of the second floor, and the fly ladder raised to the third.

The people who had crowded round the building at the first alarm of fire, were looking on as if in suspense, and the firemen knew that Conductor Forest, or one of his lion-hearted comrades, was inside, doing his noble and dangerous work. But they had no time to pay attention to what was going on.

While some of the firemen got the engine into play, the others ran in a body to the front-door of the burning house, the lower part of which was a coach-builder's warehouse. It was a heavy double door, locked and barred, and the owner had not yet arrived with the key. It was evident that the fire had originated in one of the upper floors, for there was no light in the wareroom.

"Get the pole-axe," said Dale, as soon as he found the door was fast.

Frank Willders sprang off at the word, and returned with an axe of the largest size attached to a handle nearly four feet long.

"Drive it in, Willders," said Dale.

Frank's powerful blows at once thundered on the massive door; but they fell on it in vain, for it was unusually strong. Seeing this, Dale ran back to the engine, and got out the pole.

"Come, lay hold some of you!" said he. Immediately eight firemen, Frank and Dale being at the front, charged the door like a thunderbolt with this extemporised battering-ram. It gave way with a prodigious crash, and the whole party fell over each other into the warehouse.

There was a burst of laughter from themselves, as well as from the crowd; but in another moment they were up and swarming through the premises among the smoke, searching for a point of attack.

"Send the branch up here," cried Mason, coughing violently.

"Sure, my peepers is out entirely!" gasped Corney, rushing to the window for air; while showers of water fell on his head, for the engine was already in full play.

Just then there was a noise outside, as if men were disputing violently. Dale guessed at once what it was, and ran down the staircase, calling out as he passed: "Here, Willders, Corney, Baxmore, lend a hand, will you?"

On reaching the engine, they found about a dozen roughs of the lowest character, disputing fiercely as to which of them was to pump the engine! As each man received one shilling an hour for this work, it became a desirable means of earning a good night's wages to these broad-shouldered rascals; who, in their anger, and in spite of the police, and the solitary fireman who superintended the engine, had actually caused the men already at work to cease pumping.

We may remark in passing, that this would not have been the case, but for the police force, from some unknown cause, being not very strong at that fire, and having an excited and somewhat turbulent crowd to keep in order. As a general rule, the police of London are of the most essential service at fires; and not a few of them have obtained the medals of the Society for the protection of life from fire, and other rewards for gallantry displayed in saving life at the risk of their own lives.

On the present occasion, however, the few policemen present could barely hold their ground against such a band of stalwart desperadoes, so the firemen came to the rescue. In the front of the roughs stood a man who was stronger made and better dressed than the others. He had not been pugnacious at first; but having got involved in the riot, he struck out with the rest. Dale sprang at this man, who was none other than the half-nautical individual already introduced to the reader by the name of Gorman, and launched a left-hander at his head; but Gorman stepped aside, and one of his comrades was felled instead. At this, the others made a rush in a

body at Dale; but Frank, Corney, and Baxmore come up at the moment, and each knocked down a man. Instantly Dale seized an instrument from the engine, named a "preventer," like a large boat-hook, and, raising it at the full stretch of his powerful arms, he brought it swoop down on the heads of the roughs—six of whom, including Gorman, measured their length on the ground.

Meanwhile, Bill Moxey and Jack Williams, who had charge of the branch—which is considered the post of honour at a fire—had paid no attention whatever to this little episode; but the instant the order was given, had conveyed their branch into the building, and up to the first floor, where they thought they could reach the fire more directly; for it is an axiom in fire brigades to get into a burning building *without delay*, and attack the fire at its heart.

They got the hose up a staircase, and began to play through a doorway at the head of it; but, to their surprise, did not make any impression whatever. Two other engines, however, were at work by this time—so the fire was kept in check.

"Something wrong here," said Moxey, speaking with difficulty, owing to the dense smoke.

Owing to the same cause, it was impossible to see what was wrong.

"I'll go in an' see," said Mason, dropping on his hands and knees, and creeping into the room with his mouth as close to the ground as possible. This he did, because in a room on fire there is always a current of comparatively fresh air at the floor.

Presently the sound of Mason's small hatchet was heard cutting up woodwork, and in a few seconds he rushed out almost choking.

"There," said he, "stick the branch through that hole. You've bin playin' all this time up agin' a board partition!"

Moxey and Williams advanced, put the branch through the partition, and the result was at once obvious in the diminution of smoke and increase of steam.

While these incidents were occurring outside and inside the building, the crowd was still waiting in breathless expectation for the

re-appearance of Conductor Forest of the fire-escape; for the events just narrated, although taking a long time to tell, were enacted in a few minutes.

Presently Forest appeared at the window of the second floor with two infants in his arms. Instead of sending these down the canvas trough of the escape in the usual way—at the risk of their necks, for they were very young—he clasped them to his breast, and plunging into it himself head-foremost, descended in that position, checking his speed by spreading out his knees against the sides of the canvas. Once again he sprang up the escape amid the cheers of the people, and re-entered the window.

At that moment the attention of the crowd was diverted by the sudden appearance of a man at one of the windows of the first floor.

He was all on fire, and had evidently been aroused to his awful position unexpectedly, for he was in such confusion that he did not observe the fire-escape at the other window. After shouting wildly for a few seconds, and tossing his arms in the air, he leaped out and came to the ground with stunning violence. Two policemen extinguished the fire that was about him, and then, procuring a horse-cloth lifted him up tenderly and carried him away.

It may perhaps surprise the reader that this man was not roused sooner by the turmoil and noise that was going on around him, but it is a fact that heavy sleepers are sometimes found by the firemen sound asleep, and in utter ignorance of what has been going on, long after a large portion of the houses in which they dwell have been in flames.

When Forest entered the window the second time he found the smoke thicker than before, and had some difficulty in groping his way—for smoke that may be breathed with comparative ease is found to be very severe on the eyes. He succeeded, however, in finding a woman lying insensible on the floor of the room above. In carrying her to the window he fell over a small child, which was lying on the floor in a state of insensibility. Grasping the latter with his left hand, he seized its night-dress with his teeth, and, with the woman on his shoulder, appeared on the top of the fly-ladder, which he descended in safety.

The cheers and shouts of the crowd were deafening as Forest came down; but the woman, who had begun to recover, said that her brother was in a loft above the room in which she had been found.

The Conductor, therefore, went up again, got on the roof of the house, broke through the tiles, and with much difficulty pulled the man through the aperture and conveyed him safely to the ground. (See note 1).

The firemen were already at Forest's heels, and as soon as he dragged the man through the hole in the roof, Frank and Baxmore jumped into it with the branch, and immediately attacked the fire.

By this time all the engines of the district in which the fire had occurred, and one from each of the two adjoining districts, had arrived, and were in full play, and one by one the individual men from the distant stations came dropping in and reported themselves to Dale, Mr Braidwood not being present on that occasion. There was thus a strong force of fresh firemen on the ground, and these, as they came up, were sent—in military parlance—to relieve skirmishers. The others were congregated in front of the door, moving quietly about, looking on and chatting in undertones.

Such of the public as arrived late at the fire no doubt formed a very erroneous impression in regard to these men, for not only did they appear to be lounging about doing nothing, but they were helped by one of their number to a glass of brandy—such of them at least as chose to take it. But those who had witnessed the fire from the beginning knew that these men had toiled, with every nerve and muscle strained, for upwards of an hour in the face of almost unbearable heat, half-suffocated by smoke, and drenched by hot water. They were resting now, and they had much need of rest, for some of them had come out of the burning house almost fainting from exposure to heat and smoke. Indeed, Mason *had* fainted; but the fresh air soon revived him, and after a glass of brandy he recovered sufficiently to be fit for duty again in half an hour.

Frank and Baxmore were the last to be relieved. When two fresh men came up and took the branch they descended the stairs, and a strange descent it was. The wooden stair, or flight of open steps, which they had to descend first, was burnt to charcoal, and looked as if it would fall to pieces with a touch.

"I hope it'll bear," said Frank to Baxmore, who went first.

"Bear or not bear, we *must* go down," said Baxmore.

He went unhesitatingly upon it, and although the steps bent ominously, there was enough of sound wood to sustain him.

The second stair, also of wood, had not been quite so much charred; but so great was the quantity of water poured continuously into the house, that it formed a regular water-course of the staircase, down which heaps of plaster and bricks and burnt rubbish had been washed, and had stuck here and there, forming obstructions on which the water broke and round which it roared in the form of what might have been a very respectable mountain-torrent, with this striking difference, that the water which rushed down it was *hot*, in consequence of its having passed through such glowing materials.

The lower staircase was a stone one—the worst of all stairs in a fire, owing to its liability to crack at its connection with the wall, from the combined influence of heat and cold water. Just as the two men reached the head of it, it fell, without warning, in a mass of ruins.

"Never mind," said Baxmore, "the fire-escape is still at the window."

So saying, he ran through the smoke and reached it. Frank was about to follow, when he observed a shut door. Without having any definite intention, he laid hold of the handle, and found that it was locked on the inside—he knew that, for he saw the end of the key sticking through the key-hole. At once he threw his weight on it, and burst it open. To his amazement, he found a little old lady sitting quietly, but in great trepidation, in an easy-chair, partially clothed in very scanty garments, which she had evidently thrown on in great haste.

"Go away, young man!" she screamed, drawing a shawl tightly round her. "Go away, I say! how *dare* you, sir?"

"Why, ma'am," cried Frank, striding up to her; "the house is on fire! Come, I'll carry you out."

"No—No!" she cried, pushing him resolutely away. "What! carry me—me out *thus*! I know it's on fire. Leave me, sir, I command you—I entreat you; I will die rather than appear as I am—in public."

The poor lady finished off with a loud shriek; for Frank, seeing how matters stood, and knowing there was not a moment to lose, plucked a blanket from the bed, overwhelmed her in it, and exclaiming, "Forgive me, ma'am," lifted her gently in his arms, bore her through the smoke, down the escape, to the street; carried her into a neighbouring house (the door of which was opportunely open), and laid her like a bundle on one of the beds, where he left her, with strict injunctions to the people of the house to take care of her! Frank then went out to rejoin his comrades, and refreshed himself with a glass of beer; while Baxmore, being a teetotaller, recruited his energies with a glass of water.

By this time the fire had been pretty well subdued; but there were some parts smouldering about the roof and upper floor, that rendered it necessary to keep the engines going, while the firemen hunted their foe from room to room, and corner to corner—extinguishing him everywhere; not, however, before he had completely gutted the whole house, with the exception of part of the ground floor.

"Keep away from the walls, men," said Dale, coming up to the group, who were resting.

At that moment there was a cry raised that some one was in the cellars.

At the word, Baxmore ran into the house, and descended to the basement. There was little smoke here; but from the roof, water was running down in a thick, warm shower, which drenched him in a few minutes. He ran through the whole place, but found no one, until he opened the door of a closet, when he discovered two old women who had taken refuge there; one being deaf and the other lame, as her crutches testified. They were up to the knees in water, and the same element was pouring in continuous streams on their heads—yet, like the old lady up-stairs, they refused to move or be moved.

Finding that persuasion was useless, Baxmore ran up for a horse-cloth, and, returning, threw it over the head of the deaf old woman, whom he bore, kicking violently, into the street. The other was carried out in the same fashion—only that she screamed violently, being unable to kick.

Soon after that, the fire was completely extinguished, and the engines and men returned to their several stations, leaving London once again in comparative repose.

Note 1. It is perhaps right to state here, that a deed similar to this in nearly every point was performed by Conductor Samuel Wood, a member of the London Fire-Escape Brigade, for which he received a testimonial signed by the then Lord Mayor, and a silver watch with 20 pounds from the inhabitants of Whitechapel. Wood saved nearly 200 lives by his own personal exertions. Many of his brave comrades have also done deeds that are well worthy of record, but we have not space to do more than allude to them here.

Chapter Fourteen.

Joe Corney's Adventure with Ghosts.

When we said that the firemen returned to their respective stations, it must not be supposed that the house which had been burnt was left in forlorn wretchedness. No; one of the firemen remained to watch over it, and guard against the upstarting of any sneaking spark that might have managed to conceal itself.

The man selected for this duty was Joe Corney.

Unfortunately for Joe, this was the only part of a fireman's duty that he did not relish.

Joe Corney was, both by nature and education, very superstitious. He believed implicitly in ghosts, and knew an innumerable host of persons, male and female, who had seen people who said they had seen ghosts. He was too honest to say he had ever seen a ghost himself; but he had been "very near seein' wan two or three times," and he lived in perpetual expectation and dread of meeting one face to face before he died. Joe was as brave as a lion, and faced danger, and sometimes even what appeared to be certain death, with as much unflinching courage as the bravest of his comrades. Once, in particular, he had walked with the branch in his hands along the burning roof of a tottering warehouse, near the docks, in order to gain a point from which he could play on the flames so as to prevent them spreading to the next warehouse, and so check a fire which might have easily become one of the "great fires of London."

Joe was therefore a man who could not be easily frightened; yet Joe trembled in his shoes when he had the most distant prospect of meeting with a ghost!

There was no help for it, however. He had been appointed to watch the ruin; and, being a man who cherished a strong sense of duty, he set himself doggedly to make the most of his circumstances.

It was past one o'clock when the fire was finally extinguished. A few night-birds and late revellers still hung about it, as if in the hope that it would burst forth again, and afford them fresh excitement; but

before two o'clock, everyone had gone away, and Joe was left alone with his "preventer" and lantern. Even the policeman on the beat appeared to avoid him; for, although he passed the ruin at regular intervals in his rounds, he did not stop at it beyond a few moments, to see that the fireman's lantern was burning and all right.

"Corney, me lad," said Joe to himself, "it's bad luck has befallen ye this night; but face yer luck like a man now, and shame it."

Encouraging himself thus, he grasped his preventer, and pulled about the *débris* in various places of which he had some suspicion; but the engines had done their work so effectually that not a spark remained. Then Joe walked up and down, and in and out for an hour; studied the half-consumed pictures that still hung on the walls of one of the lower rooms, which had not been completely destroyed; moralised on the dire confusion and ruin that could be accomplished in so short a space of time; reflected on the probable condition of the unfortunates who had been burnt out; on the mutability of human affairs in general, and wondered what his "owld mother" would think of him, if she saw him in his forlorn situation.

This latter thought caused his mind to revert to ghosts; but he was comforted by hearing the slow, distant foot-fall of the policeman. On it came, not unlike the supposed step of an unearthly visitant, until the guardian of the night stood revealed before him on the other side of the road.

"It's a cowld night intirely," cried Corney.

"It is," responded the policeman.

"How goes the inimy?" inquired the fireman.

"Just gone three," replied the other.

The policeman's voice, although gruff, was good-humoured and hearty; but he was evidently a strict disciplinarian, for he uttered no other word, and passed on.

"Faix, I'm gettin' slaipy," remarked Joe to himself, with a loud yawn. "I'll go and rest a bit."

So saying, he re-entered the ruin, and with the aid of his lantern sought about for the least uncomfortable apartment on the ground floor. He selected one which was comparatively weather-tight. That is to say, only one of the windows had been dashed out, and the ceiling was entire, with the exception of a hole about four feet wide, through which the charred beams above could be seen depicted against the black sky. There was about an inch of water on the floor; but this was a small matter, for Joe's boots were thick and strong. The door, too, had been burst off its hinges, and lay on the floor; but Joe could raise this, and place it in its original position.

The room had been a parlour and there were several damaged prints hanging on the walls, besides a quantity of detached paper hanging from them. Most of the furniture had been removed at the commencement of the fire; but a few broken articles remained, and one big old easy-chair, which had either been forgotten, or deemed unworthy of removal, by the men of the Salvage Corps. (See note 1.)

Joe wheeled the chair to the fireplace—not that there was any fire in it; on the contrary, it was choked up with fallen bricks and mortar, and the hearth was flooded with water; but, as Joe remarked to himself, "it felt more homelike an' sociable to sit wid wan's feet on the finder!"

Having erected the door in front of its own doorway, Joe leaned his preventer against the wall, placed his lantern on the chimney-piece, and sat down to meditate. He had not meditated long, when the steady draught of air from the window at his back began to tell upon him.

"Och! but it's a cowld wind," said he. "I'll try the other side. There's nothin' like facin' wan's inimies."

Acting on this idea, he changed his position, turning his face to the window and his back to the door.

"Well," he remarked on sitting down again, "there's about as much draught from the door; but, sure, ye've improved yer sitivation, Corney, for haven't ye the illigant prospect of over the way through the windy?"

Not long after this, Joe's mind became much affected with ghostly memories. This condition was aggravated by an intense desire to sleep, for the poor man had been hard worked that day, and stood much in need of repose. He frequently fell asleep, and frequently awoke. On falling asleep, his helmet performed extremely undignified gyrations. On awaking, he always started, opened his eyes very wide, looked round inquiringly, then smiled, and resumed a more easy position. But, awake or asleep, his thoughts ran always in the same channel.

During one of those waking moments, Joe heard a sound which rooted him to his seat with horror; and would doubtless have caused his hair to stand on end, if the helmet would have allowed it. The sound was simple enough in itself, however; being slight, slow, and regular, and was only horrible in Joe's mind, because of his being utterly unable to account for it, or to conceive what it could be.

Whatever the sound was, it banished sleep from his eyes for at least a quarter of an hour. At last, unable to stand the strain of uncertainty, he arose, drew his hatchet, took down his lantern, and, coughing loudly and sternly—as though to say:

"Have a care, I'm coming!"—removed the door and went cautiously into the passage, where the sound appeared to come from. It did not cease on his appearing; but went on slowly and steadily, and louder than before. It appeared to be at his very elbow; yet Joe could see nothing, and a cold perspiration broke out on him.

"Och! av I could only *see* it!" he gasped.

Just as he said this he *did* see it, for a turn of his lantern revealed the fact that a drop of water fell regularly from one of the burnt beams upon a large sheet of paper which had been torn from the passage wall. This, resting on the irregular rubbish, formed a sort of drum, which gave forth a hollow sound.

"Ah, then, but ye *are* a goose, Joe Corney, me boy!" said the fireman, as he turned away with an amiable smile and resumed his seat after replacing the door.

About this time the wind began to rise, and came in irregular gusts. At each gust the door was blown from the wall an inch or so, and fell

back with a noise that invariably awoke Joe with a start. He looked round each time quickly; but as the door remained quiet he did not discover the cause of his alarm. After it had done this several times Joe became, so to speak, desperately courageous.

"Git out wid ye!" he cried angrily on being startled again, "wasn't the last wan all a sham? an' sure ye're the same. Go 'long in pace—an' goodnight!"

As he said this the over-taxed man fell asleep; at the same moment a heavy gust of wind drove the door in altogether, and dashed it down on his head. Fortunately, being somewhat charred, the panel that struck his helmet was driven out, so that Joe came by no greater damage than the fright, which caused his heart to bound into his throat, for he really believed that the ghost had got him at last!

Relieving himself of the door, which he laid on the floor lest it should play him the same prank over again, Joe Corney once more settled himself in the easy-chair and resolved to give his mind to meditation. Just then the City clocks pealed forth the hour of four o'clock.

This is perhaps the quietest hour of the twenty-four in London. Before this most of the latest revellers have gone home, and few of the early risers are moving.

There was one active mind at work at that hour, however—namely, that of Gorman—who, after recovering from the blow given him by Dale, went to his own home on the banks of the Thames, in the unaristocratic locality of London Bridge.

Gorman owned a small boat, and did various kinds of business with it. But Gorman's occupations were numerous and not definite. He was everything by turns, and nothing long. When visible to the outward eye (and that wasn't often), his chief occupations were loafing about and drinking. On the present occasion he drank a good deal more than usual, and lay down to sleep, vowing vengeance against firemen in general, and Dale in particular.

Two or three hours later he awoke, and leaving his house, crossed London Bridge, and wended his way back to the scene of the fire without any definite intention, but with savage desires in his breast.

He reached it just at that point where Joe Corney had seated himself to meditate, as above described.

Joe's powers of meditation were not great at any time. At that particular time they were exerted in vain, for his head began to sway backward and forward and to either side, despite his best efforts to the contrary.

Waiting in the shadow of a doorway until the policeman should pass out of sight and hearing, and cautiously stepping over the débris that encumbered the threshold of the burnt house, Gorman peeped into the room, where the light told him that some one kept watch. Great was his satisfaction and grim his smile when he saw that a stalwart fireman sat there apparently asleep. Being only able to see his back, he could not make certain who it was,—but from the bulk of the man and breadth of the shoulders he concluded that it was Dale. Anyhow it was one of his enemies, and that was sufficient, for Gorman's nature was of that brutal kind that he would risk his life any day in order to gratify his vengeance, and it signified little to him which of his enemies fell in his way, so long as it was one of them.

Taking up a brick from the floor, he raised himself to his full height, and dashed it down on the head of the sleeping man. Just at that moment Corney's nodding head chanced to fall forward, and the brick only hit the comb of his helmet, knocking it over his eyes. Next moment he was grappling with Gorman.

As on previous occasions, Joe's heart had leaped to his throat, and that the ghost was upon him "at last" he had no manner of doubt; but no sooner did he feel the human arm of Gorman and behold his face than his native courage returned with a bound. He gave his antagonist a squeeze that nearly crushed his ribs together, and at the same time hurled him against the opposite wall. But Gorman was powerful and savage. He recovered himself and sprang like a tiger on Joe, who received him in a warm embrace with an Irish yell!

The struggle of the two strong men was for a few moments terrible, but not doubtful, for Joe's muscles had been brought into splendid training at the gymnastics. He soon forced Gorman down on one knee; but at the same moment a mass of brickwork which had been in a toppling condition, and was probably shaken down by the

violence of their movements, fell on the floor above, broke through it, and struck both men to the ground.

Joe lay stunned and motionless for a few seconds, for a beam had hit him on the head; but Gorman leaped up and made off a moment or two before the entrance of the policeman, who had run back to the house on hearing Joe's war-whoop.

It is needless to add that Joe spent the remainder of his vigil that night in an extremely wakeful condition, and that he gave a most graphic account of his adventure with the ghosts on his return to the station!

Note 1. The Salvage Corps is a body of men appointed by the insurance offices to save and protect goods at fires, and otherwise to watch over their interests. They wear a uniform and helmets, something like those of the firemen, and generally follow close in their wake—in their own vans—when fires break out.

Chapter Fifteen.

A New Phase of Life.

"Mother," said Master William Willders one night to his parent, as he sat at supper—which meal consisted of bread and milk; "he's the jolliest old feller, that Mr Tippet, I ever came across."

"I'm glad you like him, Willie," said Mrs Willders, who was busy patching the knees of a pair of small unmentionables; "but I wish, dear, that you would not use slang in your speech, and remember that fellow is not spelt with an e-r at the end of it."

"Come now, mother, don't you go an' get sarcastic. It don't suit you; besides, there's no occasion for it,—for I do my best to keep it down, but I'm so choke full of it that a word or two will spurt up now and then in spite o' me."

Mrs Willders smiled and continued her patching; Willie grinned and continued his supper.

"Mother," said Willie, after an interval of silence.

"Well, my son?"

"What d'ye think the old feller—ah! I mean fellow—is up to just now?"

"I don't know, Willie."

"He's inventin' a calc'latin' machine, as is to do anythin' from simple addition to fractions, an' he says if it works well he'll carry it on to algebra an' mathematics, up to the fizmal calc'lus, or somethin' o' that sort. Oh, you've no notion how he strains himself at it. He sits down in his shirt-sleeves at a writin'-table he's got in a corner, an' tears away at the little hair he has on the sides of his head (I do believe he tore it all off the top with them inventions), then he bangs up an' seizes his tools, and shouts, 'Look here, Willie, hold on!' an' goes sawin' and chisellin' and hammerin' away like a steam-engine. He's all but bu'st himself over that calc'latin' machine, and I'm much afraid that he'll clap Chips into the sausage-machine some day, just

to see how it works. I hope he won't, for Chips an' I are great friends, though we've only bin a month together."

"I hope he's a good man," said Mrs Willders thoughtfully.

"Well, I'm sure he must be!" cried Willie with enthusiasm, "for he is very kind to me, and also to many poor folk that come about him regularly. I'm gettin' to know their faces now, and when to expect 'em. He always takes 'em into his back room—all sorts, old men and old women an' children, most of 'em seedy enough, but some of 'em well off to *look* at. What he says to 'em I don't know, but they usually come out very grave, an go away thankin' him, and sayin' they won't forget his advice. If the advice is to come back soon they certainly *don't* forget it! And he's a great philosopher, too, mother, for he often talks to me about my int'lec's. He said jist t'other day, 'Willie,' said he, 'get into a habit o' usin' yer brains, my boy. The Almighty put us into this world well-made machines, intended to be used in all our parts. Now, you'll find thousands of people who use their muscles and neglect their brains, and thousands of others who use their brains and neglect their muscles. Both are wrong, boy; we're machines, lad—wonderful machines—and the machines won't work well if they're not used *all* over.' Don't that sound grand, mother?"

Willie might have received an answer if he had waited for one, but he was too impatient, and went rattling on.

"And who d'ye think, mother, came to see old Tippet the other day, but little Cattley, the clown's boy. You remember my tellin' you about little Cattley and the auction, don't you?"

"Yes, Willie."

"Well, he came, and just as he was goin' away I ran out an' asked him how the fairy was. 'She's very ill,' he said, shakin' his head, and lookin' so mournful that I had not the heart to ask more. But I'm goin' to see them, mother."

"That's right, my boy," said Mrs Willders, with a pleased look; "I like to hear you talk of going to see people in distress. 'Blessed are they that consider the poor,' Willie."

"Oh, as to that, you know, I don't know that they *are* poor. Only I feel sort o' sorry for 'em, somehow, and I'm awful anxious to see a real live fairy, even though she *is* ill."

"When are you going?" inquired Mrs Willders.

"To-morrow night, on my way home."

"Did you look in at Frank's lodging in passing to-night?"

"Yes, I did, and found that he was in the station on duty again. It wasn't a bad sprain, you see, an' it'll teach him not to go jumpin' out of a first-floor window again."

"He couldn't help it," said the widow. "You know his escape by the stair had been cut off, and there was no other way left."

"No other way!" cried Willie; "why didn't he *drop*? He's so proud of his strength, is Blazes, that he jumped off-hand a' purpose to show it! Ha! he'd be the better of some o' my caution. Now, mother, I'm off to bed."

"Get the Bible, then," said Mrs Willders.

Willie got up and fetched a large old family Bible from a shelf, and laid it on the table before his mother, who read a chapter and prayed with her son; after which Willie gave her one of his "roystering" kisses and went to bed.

The lamps had been lighted for some time next night, and the shop-windows were pouring forth their bright rays, making the streets appear as light as day, when Willie found himself in the small disreputable street near London Bridge in which Cattley the clown dwelt.

Remembering the directions given to him by little Jim Cattley, he soon found the underground abode near the burnt house, the ruins of which had already been cleared away and a considerable portion of a new tenement erected.

If the stair leading to the clown's dwelling was dark, the passage at the foot of it was darker; and as Willie groped his way carefully along, he might have imagined it to be a place inhabited only by rats or cats, had not gleams of light, and the sound of voices from sundry closed doors, betokened the presence of human beings. Of the compound smells peculiar to the place, those of beer and tobacco predominated.

At the farther end of this passage, there was an abrupt turn to the left, which brought the boy unexpectedly to a partially open door, where a scene so strange met his eyes that he involuntarily stood still and gazed.

In a corner of the room, which was almost destitute of furniture, a little girl, wan, weary, and thin, lay on a miserable pallet, with scanty covering over her. Beside her stood Cattley—not, as when first introduced, in a seedy coat and hat; but in full stage costume—with three balls on his head, white face, triangular roses on his cheeks, and his mouth extended outward and upward at the corners, by means of red paint. Little Jim sat on the bed beside his sister, clad in pink skin-tights, with cheeks and face similar to his father, and a red crest or comb of worsted on his head.

"Ziza, darling, are you feeling better, my lamb?" said the elder clown, with a gravity of expression in his real mouth that contrasted strangely with the expression conveyed by the painted corners.

"No, father, not much; but perhaps I'm gettin' better, though I don't feel it," said the sweet, faint voice of the child, as she opened her large hollow eyes, and looked upward.

"So, that's the fairy!" thought Willie sadly, as he gazed on the child's beautiful though wasted features.

"We'll have done d'rectly, darling," said the clown tenderly; "only one more turn, and then we'll leave you to rest quietly for some hours. Now, then, here we are again!" he added, bounding into the middle of the room with a wild laugh. "Come along, Jim, try that jump once more."

Jim did not speak; but pressing his lips to his sister's brow, leaped after his sire, who was standing an a remarkably vigorous attitude,

with his legs wide apart and his arms akimbo, looking back over his shoulder.

"Here we go," cried Jim in a tiny voice, running up his father's leg and side, stepping lightly on his shoulder, and planting one foot on his head.

"Jump down," said the clown gravely.

Jim obeyed.

"That won't do, Jim. You must do it all in one run; no pausing on the way—but, whoop! up you go, and both feet on my head at once. Don't be afeard; you can't tumble, you know."

"I'm not afeard, father," said Jim; "but I ain't quite springy in my heart to-night. Stand again and see if I don't do it right off."

Cattley the elder threw himself into the required attitude; and Cattley junior, rushed at him, ran up him as a cat runs up a tree, and in a moment was standing on his father's head with his arms extended. Whoop!—next moment he was turning round in the air; and whoop! in another moment he was standing on the ground, bowing respectfully to a supposed audience.

To Jim's immense amazement, the supposed audience applauded him heartily; and said, "Bravyo! young 'un," as it stepped into the room, in the person of William Willders.

"Why! who may *you* be?" inquired the clown senior, stepping up to the intruder.

Before Willie could answer the clown junior sprang on his father's shoulders, and whispered in his ear. Whatever he said, the result was an expression of benignity and condescension on the clown's face—as far as paint would allow of such expression.

"Glad to meet you, Master Willders," he said. "Proud to know anyone connected with T. Tippet, Esquire, who's a trump. Give us your flipper. What may be the object of your unexpected, though welcome visit to this this subterraneous grotto, which may be said to be next door to the coral caves, where the mermaids dwell."

"Yes, and there's one o' the mermaids singing," remarked the clown junior, with a comical leer, as a woman's voice was heard in violent altercation with some one. "She's a sayin' of her prayers now; beseechin' of her husband to let her have her own way."

Willie explained that, having had the pleasure of meeting with Jim at an auction sale some weeks ago, he had called to renew his acquaintance; and Jim said he remembered the incident—and that, if he was not mistaken, a desire to see a live fairy in plain clo'se, with her wings off, had something to do with his visit.

"Here she is;—by the way, what's your name?"

"Bill Willders."

"Here she is, Bill; this is the fairy," he said, in quite an altered tone, as he went to the bed, and took one of his sister's thin hands in both of his. "Ziza, this is the feller I told ye of, as wanted to see you, dear; b'longs to Mr Tippet."

Ziza smiled faintly, as she extended her hand to Willie, who took it and pressed it gently.

Willie felt a wonderfully strong sensation within his heart as he looked into the sufferer's large liquid eyes; and for a few seconds he could not speak. Suddenly he exclaimed, "Well, you ain't one bit like what I expected to see. You're more like a angel than a fairy."

Ziza smiled again, and said she didn't feel like either the one or the other.

"My poor lamb," said the clown, sitting down on the bed, and parting the dark hair on Ziza's forehead, with a hand as gentle as that of a mother, "we're goin' now. Time's up. Shall I ask Mrs Smith to stay with you again, till we come back?"

"Oh, no, no!" cried the child hurriedly, and squeezing her fingers into her eyes, as if to shut out some disagreeable object. "Not Mrs Smith. I'd rather be alone."

"I *wish* I could stay with you, Ziza," said Jim earnestly.

"It's of no use wishin', Jim," said his father, "you can't get off a single night. If you was to fail 'em you'd lose your engagement, and we can't afford that just at this time, you know; but I'll try to get Mrs James to come. She's a good woman, I know, and—"

"Mister Cattley," interrupted Willie, "if you'll allow a partic'larly humble individual to make a observation, I would say there's nothin' in life to prevent me from keeping this 'ere fairy company till you come back. I've nothin' particular to do as I knows on, an' I'm raither fond of lonely meditation; so if the fairy wants to go to sleep, it'll make no odds to me, so long's it pleases her."

"Thankee, lad," said the clown; "but you'll git wearied, I fear, for we won't be home till mornin'—"

"Ah!" interrupted Willie, "till daylight does appear. But that's no odds, neither—'cause I'm not married yet, so there's nobody awaitin' for me—and" (he winked to Jim at this point) "my mother knows I'm out."

The clown grinned at this. "You'd make one of *us*, youngster," said he, "if ye can jump. Howsever, I'm obliged by your offer, so you can stay if Ziza would like it."

Ziza said she *would* like it with such goodwill, that Willie adored her from that moment, and vowed in his heart he would nurse her till she—he did not like to finish the sentence; yet, somehow, the little that he had heard and seen of the child led him irresistibly to the conclusion that she was dying.

This having been satisfactorily arranged, the Cattleys, senior and junior, threw cloaks round them, exchanged their wigs for caps; and, regardless of the absurd appearance of their faces, hurried out to one of the minor theatres, with heavy hearts because of the little fairy left so ill and comfortless at home.

In a few minutes they were tumbling on the stage, cracking their jokes, and convulsing the house with laughter.

Chapter Sixteen.

Willie in a New Light.

Left alone with the fairy, Willie Willders began his duties as sick-nurse, a sphere of action into which he had never thought of being introduced, even in his wildest dreams.

He began by asking the fairy if she was all right and comfortable, to which she replied that she was not; upon which he explained that he meant, was she as right and comfortable as could be expected in the circumstances; could he do anything for her, in fact, or get her anything that would make her more comfortable than she was—but the fairy shook her poor head and said, "No."

"Come now, won't you have somethin' to eat? What had you for dinner?" said Willie, in a cheery voice, looking round the room, but not discovering any symptoms of food beyond a few empty plates and cups (the latter without handles), and a tea-pot with half a spout.

"I had a little bread and butter," said the fairy.

"No tipple?" inquired the nurse.

"No, except water."

"Ain't there none in the house?"

"No."

"D'ye git nothin' better at other times?" inquired Willie in surprise.

"Not often. Father is very poor. He was ill for a long time, too, and if it hadn't been for your kind master I think we should all have starved. He's better now, but he needs pretty good living to keep him up to his work—for there's a deal of training to be done, and it wears him out if he don't get meat. But the pantomimes began and we were getting on better, when the fire came and burnt everything we had almost, so we can't afford much meat or beer, and I don't like beer, so I've got them persuaded to let me live on bread and

butter and water. I would like tea better, because it's hot, but we can't afford that."

Here was a revelation! The fairy lived upon bread and butter and water! Willie thought that, but for the interpolation of the butter, it would have borne marvellous resemblance to prison fare.

"When had you dinner?" inquired Willie suddenly.

"I think about four o'clock."

"An' can't you eat nothin' now?"

Again the fairy shook her head.

"Nor drink?"

"Look if there's anything in the tea-pot," said the fairy.

Willie looked, shook his head, and said, "Not a drop."

"Any leaves?"

"Why, y–yes," he brought the pot nearer to the candle; "there are a few used-up ones."

"Oh, *do* pour some hot water into it; but I fear the water is cold, and the fire's too low to boil it, and I know the coals are done; but father gets paid his salary to-morrow, and he'll give me some tea then. He's very kind to me, father is, and so is Jim."

She sighed as she spoke, and shut her eyes.

"Ziza," said Willie in a careless tone, "you won't object to my leavin' you for a few minutes; only a few; I want to get a little fresh air, an' see what sort of a night it is; I won't be long gone."

Ziza, so far from objecting, said that she was used to being left alone for long, long hours at a time, and wouldn't mind it. So Willie put the candle nearer to her bedside, placed a tea-cup of water within

reach, went out, shut the door softly behind him, groped his way through the passage and up the stair, and got into the street.

That day his eccentric employer had paid him his first month's wage, a sovereign, with many complimentary remarks as to his usefulness. The golden coin lay in his pocket. It was the first he had ever earned. He had intended to go straight home and lay the shining piece in his mother's lap, for Willie was a peculiar boy, and had some strange notions in regard to the destination of "first-fruits." Where he had got them nobody could tell. Perhaps his mother knew, but nobody ever questioned her upon the point.

Taking this gold piece from his pocket, he ran into the nearest respectable street, and selected there the most respectable grocer's shop, into which he entered, and demanded a pound of the shopman's best tea, a pound of his best sugar, a pound of his best butter, a cut of his best bacon, and one of his best wax-candles. Willie knew nothing about relative proportion in regard to such things; he only knew that they were usually bought and consumed together.

The shopman looked at the little purchaser in surprise, but as Willie emphatically repeated his demands he gave him the required articles. On receiving the sovereign he looked twice at Willie, rung the piece of money three times on the counter, and then returned the change.

Gathering the packages in his arms, and putting the candle between his vest and bosom, he went into a baker's shop, purchased a loaf, and returned to the "subterraneous grotto" laden like the bee. To say that the fairy was surprised when he displayed these things, would be a feeble use of language. She opened her large eyes until Willie begged her in alarm not to open them wider for fear they should come out, at which sally she laughed, and then, being weak, she cried.

After that she fell in with her nurse's humour, and the two proceeded to "have a night of it." Ziza said she'd be a real fairy and tell him what to do, and Willie said he'd be a gnome or a he-fairy and do it.

At the outset Willie discovered that he had forgotten coals, but this was rectified by another five minutes' airing, and a rousing fire was

quickly roaring in the chimney, while the kettle sang and spluttered on it like a sympathetic thing, as no doubt it was. Willie cleared the small table that stood at the invalid's bed side, and arranged upon it the loaf, the tea-pot, two cracked tea-cups, the butter and sugar, and the wax-candle—which latter was stuck into a quart bottle in default of a better candle-stick.

"Now, ain't that jolly?" said the nurse, sitting down and rubbing his hands.

"Very!" replied the patient, her eyes sparkling with delight.

"It's so like a scene in a play," continued Willie.

"Only much more real," suggested the fairy.

"Now, then, Ziza, have a cup o' tea, fresh from the market o' Chiny, as your dad would say, if he was sellin' it by auction. He's a knowin' codger your dad is, Ziza. There. I knowed I forgot somethin' else—the cream!"

"I don't mind it, indeed I don't," said Ziza earnestly.

Willie had started up to run out and rectify this omission, but on being assured that the fairy liked tea almost as well without as with cream, and that there was no cream to be got near at hand, he sat down again and continued to do the honours of the table. First he made the fairy sit up in bed, and commented sadly on her poor thin neck as she did it, observing that she was nothing better than a skeleton in a skin. Then he took off his own jacket and put it on her shoulders, tying the arms round her neck. Next he placed a piece of board in front of her, saying that it was a capital tray, and on this he arranged the viands neatly.

"Now, then, go at it, Ziza," he said, when all was arranged.

Ziza, who received his attentions with looks that were wonderfully gleeful for one in her weak state of health, went at it with such vigour that the bread was eaten and the tea drunk in a few minutes, and the supply had to be renewed. When she was in the middle of her second round of buttered toast (for Willie had toasted the bread), she stopped suddenly.

"Why don't you go on?" asked Willie.

"Because you have not eaten or drunk one mouthful yet."

"But I'm lookin' at you, and ain't that better? Howsever, if ye won't go on, I'll not keep you back," and with that Willie set to work, and, being uncommonly hungry, did what he styled "terrible execution among the wittles."

For some time the nurse and patient ate in comparative silence, but by degrees they began to talk, and as they became more confidential their talk became more personal.

"D'you like bein' a fairy?" said Willie, after a lull in the conversation.

"No, I don't," replied Ziza.

"Why not?"

"Because—because—I don't like the kind of things we have to do, and—and—in short, I don't like it at all, and I often pray God to deliver me from it."

"That's strange, now," said Willie, "I would have thought it great fun to be a fairy. I'd rather be a little clown or a he-fairy myself, now, than anything else I know of, except a fireman."

"A fireman, Willie?"

"Yes, a fireman. My brother, Blaz—a—Frank, I mean, is one, and he saved the lives of some people not long since."

Of course Willie here diverged into a graphic account of the fire in Beverly Square, and, seeing that Ziza listened with intense earnestness, he dilated upon every point, and went with special minuteness into the doings of Frank.

When he concluded, Ziza heaved a very deep sigh and closed her eyes.

"I've tired you, Ziza," exclaimed Willie, jumping up, with a look of anxiety, and removing the tea-board and jacket, as the child slipped down under the clothes. He asked if she wanted to go to sleep.

"Yes, for I'm *very* tired," she sighed languidly; then added, "but please read to me a little first."

"What book am I to read you?" said Willie, looking round the room, where no book of any kind was to be seen.

"Here, it's under the pillow."

Willie put his hand under the pillow and pulled out a small pocket-Bible.

"Read the third chapter of Saint John's Gospel," said the child, closing her eyes.

Willie read in the monotonous tones of a schoolboy's voice until he came to the sixteenth verse, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

"Stop at *that* verse," whispered Ziza. "I'll go to sleep now."

Her deep breathing soon proclaimed that she was in the land of dreams, so Willie removed the candle a little further away from her, and then, resting his elbows on the table and his head in his hands, began to read the Bible. He turned over a few pages without much intention of finding any particular place, for he was beginning to feel sleepy.

The first words his eyes fell upon were, "Blessed are they that consider the poor."

He roused up a little at this, and read the verse again, for he connected it with the fact that the fairy was poor. Then he pondered it for some time, and, falling asleep, dropt his head on the Bible with such force that he woke up for a little and tried to read again, but do what he would he could not get beyond that verse; finally he gave up the attempt, and, laying his forehead down upon it, quickly fell sound asleep.

In this state the couple were discovered an hour or two later by Messrs Cattley senior and junior on their return from the theatre.

"Inscrutable mysteries! say, what is this?" exclaimed the elder clown, advancing into the room on tiptoe.

Apostrophising his eye and one Betty Martin, the younger clown said that it was a "rare go and no mistake," whereupon his father laid his hand on Willie's shoulder and gently shook him.

"Eh! another cup, Ziza?" exclaimed the self-accused nurse, as he put out his hand to seize the tea-pot. "Hallo! I thought it was the fairy," he added, looking up with a sleepy smile; "I do believe I've gone and fell asleep."

"Why, lad, where got ye all those things?" inquired the senior Cattley, laying aside his cloak and cap, and speaking in a low tone, for Ziza was still sleeping soundly.

"Well, I got 'em," replied Willie in a meditative tone, "from a friend of mine—a very partikler friend o' mine—as declines to let me mention his name, so you'll have to be satisfied with the wittles and without the name of the wirtuous giver. P'r'aps it was a dook, or a squire, or a archbishop as did it. Anyway his name warn't Walker. See now, you've bin an' woke up the fairy."

The sick child moved as he spoke, but it was only to turn, without awaking, on her side.

"Well, lad," said the clown, sitting down and looking wistfully in the face of his daughter, "you've got your own reasons for not tellin' me—mayhap I've a pretty good guess—anyhow I say God bless him, for I do b'lieve he's saved the child's life. I've not seen her sleep like that for weeks. Look at her, Jim; ain't she like her old self?"

"Yes, father, she don't need no paint and flour to make a fairy on her just now. She's just like what she was the last time I seed her go up in a gauze cloud to heaven, with red and blue fire blazin' all round her."

"I'll bid ye good-night now," said Willie, buttoning up his jacket to the chin, and pulling his cap down on his brows with the air of a man who has a long walk before him.

"You're off, are you—eh?" said the elder clown, rising and taking Willie by the hand, "well, you're a good lad. Thank'ee for comin' here an' takin' care of Ziza. My subterranean grotto ain't much to boast of, but such as it is you're welcome to it at all times. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Willie; "good-night, Jim." Jim replied good-night heartily, and then Willie stepped into the dark passage. He glanced back at the fairy before shutting the door, but her eyes were closed, so he said good-night to her in his heart, and went home.

Chapter Seventeen.

Home Life.

"My dear Miss Tippet, I shall never, no never, get over it."

So said, and so undoubtedly thought, a thin little old lady with remarkably bright eyes, and a sweet old face, as she sat sipping tea at Miss Tippet's elbow.

It was in the drawing-room of Miss Deemas that she sat, and the Eagle sat opposite to her.

"It was very dreadful," responded Miss Tippet with a sigh—"very."

"It was awful. I know I shall never get over it,—never," repeated the little old lady, finishing her tea, and asking for another cup in the calmest possible voice, with the sweetest possible smile.

"Oh yes, you will, Mrs Denman," said Miss Deemas snappishly.

"No, indeed, I won't," repeated Mrs Denman; "how can I? Just think of the situation. Sitting in my chair in dishabille, when a man—a Man, Miss Dee—"

"Well, I know what a *man* is," said the Eagle bitterly; "why don't you go on?"

"Burst himself through my bedroom-door," continued Mrs Denman, "with lime and charcoal and brick-dust and water streaming down his face—f–fo-olded me in his arms, bore me out into the street—the *street*! Oh! I shall never, *never* get over it; and so little, so *very* little clothing on me—"

"How much had you on?" asked Miss Deemas in a deep voice, the calmness of which contrasted forcibly with Mrs Denman's excited tones.

"Really, Miss Deemas, I see no necessity for going into particulars. It is sufficient to know that I was carried by a *man* into the *street* in the

face of some thousands of people, for I heard them cheering though I saw them not. I know I shall never get over it—another cup, my love; not *quite* so much sugar—no, not if I were to live to the age of Methusaleh."

"I don't wonder, indeed I don't," murmured the sympathetic Miss Tippet. "I think, Julia dear, you are a little too hard on Mrs Denman. How would *you* like to have been carried out of a burning house in such a way by a big rough man?"

"Oh, my dear," interposed Mrs Denman, "I did not say he was rough. Big he certainly was, and strong, but I must do him the justice to say that the man li—lif—oh me! lifted me up very tenderly, and carried me as though I had been an infant and he my mother, through smoke and fire and water, into the street, before the eyes of the—whole—oh, it's too awful to think of!"

"Stuff!" ejaculated Miss Deemas, pecking a piece of cake out of her fingers as she would, metaphorically of course, have pecked the eyes out of the head of Frank Willders, or any other man. "Didn't you say he put a blanket round you?"

"Of course, Miss Deemas; I should have died otherwise of pure shame."

"No, you wouldn't," retorted the Eagle. "You would probably have been half suffocated and a good deal dirtied, and you might have been singed, but you wouldn't have died; and what need you care now, for the people saw nothing but a bundle. You might have been a bundle of old clothes for all they knew or cared. All they wanted to see was the bravery, as they call it, of the man; as if there were not hundreds upon hundreds of women who would do the same thing if their muscles were strong enough, and occasion served."

"But it *was* a brave act, you know," said Miss Tippet timidly.

"I don't know that," retorted Miss Deemas, helping herself to more cake with as much decision of manner as if she had been carrying it off by force of arms from before the very muzzles of a masculine battery. "I don't know that. He had to escape, you know, for his own life, and he might as well bring a bundle along with him as not."

"Yes; but then," said Miss Tippet, "he first went up the—the thingumy, you know."

"No, he didn't," retorted Miss Deemas smartly; "he was in the house at the time, and only came down the 'thingumy,' as you call it!"

It was a peculiarity of Miss Deemas's character, that she claimed the right to be as rude as she chose to people in her own house, and rather prided herself on this evidence of independence.

"In my opinion," said Mrs Denman, "his being in the burning house at all of his own accord, was of itself evidence of courage. I think the fireman is a brave young man."

Thus much Mrs Denman said with dignity to Miss Deemas. The remainder of her speech she addressed to Miss Tippet.

"But, my dear, I feel that although I owe this young man a debt of gratitude which I can never repay, I shall never be able to look my preserver in the face. I *know* that his mind will always revert, when he sees me, to the fi—fig—the figure that he lifted out of that easy-chair. But there is one thing I have resolved on," continued the little old lady in more cheerful tones, as she asked for another cup of tea, "and that is, to get a fireman to instruct me as to the best method of saving my own life should fire again break out in my dwelling."

The Eagle gave a hysterical chuckle at this.

"I have already written to one who has been recommended to me as a shrewd man, and he is coming to call on me this very evening at seven o'clock."

Mrs Denman started, as if her own remark had recalled something, and pulled out her watch.

"Why, it is almost half-past six!" she exclaimed, rising hastily. "Excuse a hurried departure, Miss Deemas. Your society and sympathy" (she looked pointedly at Miss Tippet here) "have been so agreeable that I did not observe how time was flying. Good-bye, Miss Deemas. Good evening, *dear* Miss Tippet."

Miss Deemas bowed.

"Good-bye, my love," said Miss Tippet, bustling round her friend. "I'm *so* glad to have met you, and I hope you'll come and see me soon; 6 Poor-thing Lane, remember. Come whenever you please, dear Mrs Denman. Yes, yes, time does indeed fly, as you say; or as my friend, Sir Archibald What's-his-name used to remark, 'Tempit fugus something re-what's-'is-name.' *Good-bye*, dear Mrs Denman."

While the ladies were thus engaged, one whom the Eagle would have tossed her beak at with supreme contempt was enjoying himself in the bosom of his family. This was none other than Joe Corney himself, who, having received a "stop" for a distant fire, had looked in on his wife to tell her of the note he had received from Mrs Denman.

The family bosom resided in a small portion of a small house in the small street where the fire-engine dwelt.

Joe had laid his helmet on the table, and, having flung himself into a chair, seized his youngest child, a little girl, in his arms, raised her high above his head and laughed in her face; at which the child chuckled and crowed to the best of its ability.

Meanwhile his eldest son, Joe junior, immediately donned the helmet, seized the poker, thrust the head of it into a bucket of water, and, pointing the other end at a supposed fire, began to work an imaginary hand-pump with all his might.

"It's goin' out, daddy," cried the urchin.

"Sure, he's a true chip o' the owld block," observed his mother, who was preparing the evening meal of the family; "he's uncommon fond o' fire an' wather."

"Molly, my dear," said the fireman, "I'd have ye kape a sharp eye on that same chip, else his fondness for fire may lead to more wather than ye'd wish for."

"I've bin thinkin' that same meself, honey," replied Mrs Corney, placing a pile of buttered toast on the table. "Shure didn't I kitch him puttin' a match to the straw bed the other day! Me only consolation is that ivery wan in the house knows how to use the hand-pump. Ah, then, ye won't believe it, Joe, but I catched the baby at it this

mornin', no later, an' she'd have got it to work, I do believe, av she hadn't tumbled right over into the bucket, an' all but drownded herself. But, you know, the station's not far off, if the house did git alight. Shure ye might run the hose from the ingin to here without so much as drawin' her out o' the shed. Now, then, Joe, tay's ready, so fall to."

Joe did fall to with the appetite of a man who knows what it is to toil hard, late and early. Joe junior laid aside the helmet and poker, and did his duty at the viands like the true son of a fireman—not to say an Irishman—and for five minutes or so the family enjoyed themselves in silence. After that Joe senior heaved a sigh, and said that it would be about time for him to go and see the old lady.

"What can it be she wants?" asked Mrs Corney.

"Don't know," replied her husband. "All I know is that she's the old lady as was bundled neck and crop out o' the first-floor windy o' the house in Holborn by Frank Willders. She's a quare owld woman that. She's got two houses, no less; wan over the coachmaker's shop—the shop bein' her property—an' wan in Russell Square. They say she's rich enough to line her coffin with goold an inch thick. Spakin' o' that, Molly my dear, a quare thing happened to me the other night. It's what ye call a coinsidence."

"What's that, Joe?"

"Well, t'ain't easy to explain, but it means two things happenin' together in a most onlikely way—d'ye see?"

"No, I don't, Joe," replied Mrs Corney, helping herself to another slice of toast.

"Well, it don't matter much," resumed Joe, "but this is what it was: Mr Dale an' me was sittin', about two in the mornin', at the station fire smokin' our pipes (for it was my turn on duty) an' chattin' away about one thing an' another, when somehow we got upon tellin' our experiences, an' Dale he tells me a story o' how he was once called to a fire in a cemetary, an' had to go down among the coffins—for they was afire—an' what a fright some o' his men got, when, just as he had finished, an' all my flesh was creepin' at wot I'd heard, there comes a ring at the bell an' a call to a fire in Portland Street. I runs

an' gets out the ingin, an' Frank (he was my mate that night) he rings up the boys, an' away we wint in tin minutes. It wasn't far, an' when we got there in we wint into the house, which was full o' smoke, but no fire to be seen. We wint coughin' and sneezin' an' rubbin' our eyes down into a cellar, where the lads of another ingin was at work before us wi' the hand-pumps, an', would ye belaive it? but the walls o' that cellar was lined wi' coffins! True for ye, there they was, all sizes, as thick as they could stand. I thought I was dramin', but it was no drame, for it was an undertaker's shop; an' when I wint upstairs, after we diskivered the fire an' put it out, I sees two coffins on tressels lyin' ready for use. Wan was black-painted wood, no doubt for a poor man, an' nothin' inside o't. The other alongside was covered wid superfine black cloth an' silver-mounted handles, an' name-plate, an' it was all padded inside an' lined wid white satin!"

"White satin, Joe? You're jokin'."

"As sure as your name's Molly, it was white satin," repeated Joe; "I wouldn't have belaived it av I hadn't seen it; but that's the way the quality goes to their graves. I looks at the two coffins as I was comin' away, an' thinks I to myself, I wonder whether the poor man or the rich man'll be most comfortable when they're laid there?"

"Now, Molly, I'll bid ye good-night an' be off to see this owld lady, this Mrs Denman. Look afther that boy, now, an kape the matches out of his way, whativer ye do."

With this very needful warning, Joe Corney kissed his wife and the baby, and went off to the station to obtain leave of absence for a couple of hours.

Chapter Eighteen.

Joe Corney's Advice.

Wending his way through the crowded streets, Joe soon reached the door of the house in Russell Square which belonged to Mrs Denman.

The good lady had made use of a cab after quitting Miss Deemas, so that she was at home and seated in a luxuriously easy chair in her splendidly furnished drawing-room when the fireman applied the knocker.

"Does Mrs Denman stop here, my dear?" said Joe to the smart servant-girl who opened the door.

"Yes," replied the girl, "and she told me to show you up to the drawing-room whenever you came. Step this way."

Joe pulled off his cap and followed the maid, who ushered him into the presence of the little old lady.

"Pray take a chair," said Mrs Denman, pointing to one which had evidently been placed close to hers on purpose. "You are a fireman, I understand?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied Joe, "I've bin more nor tin years at the business now."

"You must find it a very warm business, I should imagine," said Mrs Denman, with a smile.

"True for ye, ma'am. My body's bin a'most burnt off my sowl over and over again; but it's cowld enough, too, sometimes, specially when ye've got to watch the premises after the fire's bin put out of a cowld winter night, as I had to do at *your* house, ma'am."

Mrs Denman started and turned pale.

"What! d'you mean to say that you were at the fire in—in Holborn that night?"

"Indeed I do, ma'am. Och! but ye must be ill, ma'am, for yer face is as white as a ghost. Shure but it's *red* now. Let me shout for some wather for ye, ma'am."

"No, no, my good man," said Mrs Denman, recovering herself a little. "I—I—the fact is, it did not occur to me that you had been at *that* fire, else I would never—but no matter. You didn't see—see—any one saved, did you?"

"See any one saved, is it? Shure, I did, an' yerself among the lot. Och! but it's Frank Willders as knows how to do a thing nately. He brought ye out o' the windy, ma'am, on his showlder as handy as if ye'd bin a carpet-bag, or a porkmanty, ma'am—"

"Hush, *man*!" exclaimed poor Mrs Denman, blushing scarlet, for she was a very sensitive old lady; "I cannot bear to think of it. But how could—you know it was me? *It—it—might* have been anything—a bundle, you know."

"Not by no manes," replied the candid Joe. "We seed your shape quite plain, ma'am, for the blankit was tight round ye."

Mrs Denman covered her face with her hand at this point, and resting her elbow on the arm of her chair, reflected that the thing was beyond remedy, and that, as the man had come and was now looking at her, matters could not be worse; so she resolved to carry out her original intention, and question him as to the best course of action in the event of fire.

"My good man," she said, "I have taken the liberty of asking you to come here to tell me what I should do to guard against fire in future."

Joe rubbed his nose and looked at the ground; then he stroked his chin and looked at the old lady; then a look of intelligence lighted up his expressive countenance as he said abruptly—

"Is yer house an' furniture insured, ma'am?"

"No, it is not," replied Mrs Denman. "I have never insured in my life, because although I hear of fires every day in London, it has never occurred to me until lately that there was any probability of

my house being burned. I know it was very foolish of me, but I shall see to having it done directly."

"That's right, ma'am," said Joe, with an approving nod. "If you seed the heaps an' heaps o' splendid furnitur' an' goods an' buildin's as is burnt every day a'most in London, an' lost to the owners 'cause they grudged the few shillin's of insurance, or 'cause they was careless an' didn't b'lieve a fire would ever come to them, no matter how many might come to other folk, you'd insure yer house an' furnitur' first thing i' the mornin', ma'am."

"I have no doubt you say what is quite correct, Mr Corney, and I will certainly attend to this matter in future; but I am more particularly anxious to know how I should act if the house in which I live were to take fire."

"Get out of it as fast as possible," said Joe promptly, "an' screech out *fire*! till yer sides is sore."

"But suppose," said Mrs Denman, with a faint smile, "that the fire is burning in the stair, and the house full of smoke, what am I to do?"

"Och! I see yer drift now, ma'am," said Joe, with a knowing look. "Av it's that what ye wants to know, I'll just, with your lave, ma'am, give ye a small discourse on the subjic'."

Joe cleared his throat, and began with the air of a man who knows what he is talking about.

"It's as well, ma'am, to begin by tryin' to prevent yer house ketchin' fire—prevention bein' better nor cure. If ye'd kape clear o' that, there's two or three small matters to remimber. First of all, take oncommon good care o' your matches, an' don't let the childer git at 'em, if you've any in the house. Would you believe it, ma'am, there was above fifty fires in London last year that was known to ha' bin set alight by childers playin' wid matches, or by careless servants lettin' 'em drop an' treadin' on 'em?"

"How many?" asked Mrs Denman in surprise.

"Fifty, ma'am."

"Dear me! you amaze me, fireman; I had supposed there were not so many fires in London in a year."

"A year!" exclaimed Joe. "Why, there's nearly three fires, on the average, every twinty-four hours in London, an' that's about a thousand fires in the year, ma'am."

"Are you sure of what you say, fireman?"

"Quite sure, ma'am; ye can ax Mr Braidwood if ye don't b'lieve me."

Mrs Denman, still in a state of blank amazement, said that she did not doubt him, and bade him go on.

"Well, then," resumed Joe, "look well arter yer matches, an' niver read in bed; that's the way hundreds o' houses get a light. When you light a candle with a bit o' paper, ma'am, don't throw it on the floor an' tramp on it an' think it's out, for many a time there's a small spark left, an' the wind as always blows along the floor sets it up an' it kitches somethin', and there you are—blazes an' hollerin' an' ingins goin' full swing in no time. Then, ma'am, never go for to blow out yer gas, an' if there's an escape don't rest till ye get a gasfitter and find it out. But more particularly don't try to find it yerself with a candle. Och! if ye'd only seen the blows up as I've seen from gas, ye'd look better arter it. Not more nor two weeks gone by, ma'am, we was called to attend a fire which was caused by an escape o' gas. W'en we got there the fire was out, but sitch a mess you niver did see. It was a house, ma'am, in the West End, with the most illigant painted walls and cornices and gimcracks, idged all with goold. The family had just got into it—noo done up for 'em, only, by good luck, there wasn't much o' the furnitur' in. They had smelled a horrid smell o' gas for a good while, but couldn't find it. At last the missis, she goes with a workman an a *candle* to look for it, an' sure enough they found it in a bathroom. It had been escapin' in a small closet at the end o' the bath, and not bein' able to git out, for the door was a tight fit, it had gone away an' filled all the space between the ceilin's an' floors, an' between the lath, and plaster, and the walls. The moment the door in the bath-room was opened all this gas took light an' blowed up like gunpowder. The whole inner skin o' the beautiful drawing-room, ma'am, was blowed into the middle of the room. The cook, who was in the drawin'-room passage, she was blow'd down stairs; the workman as opened the little door, he was blow'd flat on

his back; an' the missis, as was standin' with her back to a door, she was lifted off her legs and blow'd right through the doorway into a bedroom."

"Gracious!" exclaimed the horrified Mrs Denman, "was she killed?"

"No, ma'am, she warn't killed. Be good luck they was only stunned an' dreadful skeared, but no bones was broken."

Mrs Denman found relief in a sigh.

"Well, ma'am," continued Joe, "let me advise you to sweep yer chimleys once a month. When your chimley gets afire the sparks they get out, and when sparks get out of a windy night there's no tellin' what they won't light up. It's my opinion, ma'am, that them as makes the laws should more nor double the fines for chimleys goin' afire. But suppose, ma'am, your house gets alight in spite of you—well then, the question is what's best to do?"

Mrs Denman nodded her old head six or seven times, as though to say, "That is precisely the question."

"I'll tell you, ma'am,"—here Joe held up the fore-finger of his right hand impressively. "In the first place, every one in a house ought to know all the outs and ins of it, 'cause if you've got to look for things for the first time when the cry of 'Fire' is raised, it's not likely that you'll find 'em. Now, d'ye know, or do the servants know, or does anybody in the house know, where the trap in the roof is?"

Mrs Denman appeared to meditate for a minute, and then said that she was not sure. She herself did not know, and she thought the servants might be ignorant on the point, but she rather thought there was an old one in the pantry, but they had long kept a cat, and so didn't require it.

"Och!" exclaimed Joe, with a broad grin, "sure it's a trap-door I'm spakin' of."

Mrs Denman professed utter ignorance on this point, and when told that it ought to be known to every one in the house as a mode of escape in the event of fire, she mildly requested to know what she would have to do if there were such a trap.

"Why, get out on the roof to be sure," (Mrs Denman shivered) "and get along the tiles to the next house," (Mrs Denman shut her eyes and shuddered) "an' so make yer escape. Then you should have a ladder fixed to this trap-door so as it couldn't be took away, and ye should have some dozen fathoms o' half-inch rope always handy, cause if ye was cut off from the staircase by fire an' from the roof by smoke ye might have to let yourself down from a windy. It's as well, too, to know how to knot sheets and blankets together, so that the ties won't slip, for if you have no rope they'd be better than nothin'. You should also have a hand-pump, ma'am, and a bucket of water always handy, 'cause if you take a fire at the beginnin' it's easy put out. An' it's as well to know that you should go into a room on fire on your hands and knees, with your nose close to the ground—just as a pinter-dog goes—'cause there's more air there than overhead; an' it's better to go in wi' the hand-pump the first thing. Don't wait to dress, ma'am."

"Stop, stop, Mr Corney!" cried Mrs Denman, holding up her hand.

The little lady was stunned with the rapid utterance of the enthusiastic fireman, and with the dreadful suggestion that she, Mrs Denman, should, in the dead of night, get upon the roof of her dwelling and scramble over the tiles, or let herself down by a rope from a window into the public street, or creep into a burning room on her hands and knees with her nose to the ground like a pointer, and all this, too, in her night-dress, so she begged of him to stop, and said:

"But you forget, fireman, it is impossible for *me* to do any of these dreadful things."

"Well, ma'am," returned Joe coolly, "it wouldn't be easy—though, for the matter o' that, it's wonderful what people will do for their lives; but I was tellin' ye, ma'am, what ought to be done, so as somebody else in the house might do it, if you couldn't.

"But suppose, ma'am," continued Joe, without waiting for a reply; "suppose that the house is alight. Well, the first thing you've got to do, is not to get into a fluster. That can't do no good, you know, and is sure to do mischief. Keep cool. That's the first thing, ma'am; and be deliberate in all ye do. The second thing is, to wrap a blanket round ye, an' get out of the house as fast as ye can without stoppin'

to dress. It's of no use lookin' put out, ma'am; for it's better to escape without yer clo'es than to be burnt alive in 'em. Then be careful to *shut all doors after ye* as ye go. This keeps the air from gittin' at the fire, and so smothers it down till the ingines come up. Also keep all windows shut. If the smoke is like to choke ye, git yer nose as near the ground as possible, an' go along on yer hands and knees. A bit o' flannel or a worsted sock held over yer mouth an' nose, will help you to bear it better.

"If ye can't escape by the street-door, or the trap in the roof, then get into a front room, where you will be more easy to be got at wid ladders or fire-escapes, an' see that *every mimber o' the household* is there. Many a wan has bin forgotten in the hurry-skurry of a fire, and left asleep in bed, ignorant o' the danger till too late; when a cool head might have missed 'em, and wakened 'em in time. Whatever ye do, ma'am—keep cool."

The probability of poor Mrs Denman keeping cool in such circumstances was uncommonly small; for she was at that moment hot all over, and her face flushed at the mere recital of such horrors!

Joe then went on to state, that the very last thing she should do was to jump from a window (a somewhat unnecessary piece of advice, poor Miss Denman thought), and that, when she was compelled to take such a step, she should first of all pitch over all the blankets and bedding she could lay hold of to make her fall easy. He wound up with an emphatic reiteration of the assurance that her only chance lay in "keeping cool."

That night, poor Mrs Denman, in a condition of mind that is utterly indescribable, because inconceivable, went through the whole of the dreadful processes which Joe had described; and did it, too, with miraculous presence of mind and energy—in her dreams.

Chapter Nineteen.

Dark Plots are hatched.

Gorman was one of those peculiar characters who, in personal appearance, are totally devoid of peculiarity. He was a middle-sized, thick-set, commonplace, grave, quiet man; very powerful—but not apparently so; one whom it was impossible to "find out" unless he chose to let himself be found out. Above all, he was a reserved man.

Everybody knew well enough, at least among his intimates, that he was named Gorman; but not one of the number knew what his Christian name was. A few were aware that he signed himself "D. Gorman"; but whether the "D" represented David, dastard, drunkard, or demon, was a matter of pure speculation to all, a few of his female acquaintance excepted (for he had no friends), who asserted roundly that it represented them all, and some were even willing to go the length of saying that it represented more, and stood for dirty, drivelling, desperate, and a few other choice words which it is quite unnecessary to mention. Only a few, and these were among the knowing and peculiarly observant ones of Gorman's intimates, said that "D" stood for "deep." But then, many of those who thus pronounced their opinion, were comparatively worthless characters, given to scandal and slander; so the reader must not allow himself to be biassed too much by their report.

Certain it is, however, that when Gorman was asked on one occasion what his Christian name was, he replied that he had no Christian name; because he didn't believe in Christianity, and that he signed himself "D," to be distinguished from the other Gormans who might chance to exist in the universe.

People were not at all shocked at his bold statement of unbelief; because, in the circle in which he moved, the same disbelief was pretty general.

Besides many other traits and qualities, definable and indefinable, Gorman had the power of assuming the appearance either of a burglar of the lowest type, or a well-to-do contractor or tradesman. A slight change in dress and manner were sufficient to metamorphose him beyond recognition.

Everybody knew, also, that Gorman was the landlord of a small public-house at the corner of a dirty street, not far from London Bridge; and that he kept a stout, middle-aged man on the premises to do the duty of host, while he himself went about "other business," which nobody knew of, and which no one could find out, although many had tried to do so with all their might.

Every day in the year, Gorman might have been seen at the "Golden Swan"; but never for longer than a few minutes at a time, when he inspected the books, received the cash drawn the day before; and made an impression on all in the premises, that tended to convince them they were well looked after.

"Humph!" ejaculated Gorman, as he finished counting the dirty coppers and pieces of silver which his agent had delivered to him, and dropped them from his dirty fingers into a dirty leather bag: "Business is dull, I think."

"It ain't brisk just now, sir," replied the deputy-landlord of the "Golden Swan."

Gorman received this reply with another "Humph," and then, putting the bag in his coat pocket, prepared to leave.

"No one bin askin' for me?" inquired Gorman.

"No, sir; no one."

"I'll be back to-morrow about this time."

The deputy knew that this was false, for his employer invariably came at a different hour each day, in order to take "the house" by surprise; but he said, "Very well, sir," as usual.

"And mind," continued Gorman, "that you put the lights out. You're uncommon careful about that, I hope?"

It is worthy of remark, in reference to Gorman's anxiety about putting out lights, that he had been burned out of several sets of premises in the course of a few years. He was quite a martyr, as it were, to fire. Unaccountably worried, pursued, and damaged by it—no, not damaged, by the way; because Gorman was a prudent man,

and always insured to the full amount. His enemies sometimes said *above* it; but neither they nor we have any means of proving or disproving that.

The deputy protested that he always exercised the utmost precaution in putting everything out every night—from the last beery lingerer, to the gas—and that he felt quite put out himself at being asked the question, as it implied a doubt of his care and attention to business. Hereupon Gorman said "Good-night," and the deputy returned to the counter, where besotted men and drunken women awaited his attendance.

Three-quarters of an hour sufficed to convey Gorman from the east to the west end of London. Here he sought the well-known precincts of Poorthing Lane, and entered the shop of Mr David Boone.

That worthy received him with a look of glad surprise; but with a feeling of the deepest misery.

"Anyone inside?" asked Gorman.

"No," said Boone, "'cept the boy. I'll call him to mind the shop, and then we can be alone."

As Gorman did not vouchsafe a reply, but walked straight into the little room behind the shop, Boone called the boy, and bade him mind the shop, while he held private consultation with his friend.

The shop-boy enjoyed the name of Robert Roddy. He was a soft-faced, washed-out youth, with a disposition to wink both eyes in a meek manner. Rough-spoken people called him an idiot, but Roddy was not quite such an idiot as they took him for. He obeyed his master's mandate by sitting down on a tall stool near the window, and occupied himself in attempting to carve a human face on the head of a walking-stick.

"Glad to see you, Mr Gorman," said Boone, seating his tall body on a low stool at the side of his friend, who, with his hat on, had thrown himself into an armchair, and spread out both legs before the fire. "Very glad to see you, indeed, in my—little sanctum, my withdrawing room, if I may venture to use the name, to which I retire during the intervals of business."

Boone said this with an air of pleasantry, and smiled, but his visitor did not encourage him.

"Pretty long intervals, I should suppose," he growled, pulling out his pipe and lighting it.

Boone admitted, with a sigh, that they were, and observed that trade was extremely dull—astonishingly dull.

"Why, would you believe it, sir, I have not sold twenty shillings' worth o' goods all last week, and only one wax-doll within the month, although it's gettin' well on for Christmas-time? One would a'most fancy the childr'n was about to give up such vanities an' devote themselves to serious business. It's a serious business for the like of us, anyhow."

Again Mr Boone smiled, and again failed to make an agreeable impression on his visitor, who demanded in a surly tone if he had been thinking over it, and made up his mind to do it.

Boone's face changed at this indefinite question, and became a shade paler than it was by nature, as he replied, hesitatingly, that he *had* been thinking over it, and that he had made up his mind *not* to do it.

"Oh, you have, have you?" said Gorman in a tone of irony. "Very good; then I'll trouble you to pay me the three hundred pounds you owe me by this day next week, and the rent of this here tenement for last half."

Boone's face became still paler.

"You're a hard landlord," said he.

"You're a soft tenant," retorted Gorman.

"You know what the punishment is by law," continued Boone.

"Yes—death," said the other drily; "but you know as well as I do that it's never carried out nowadays."

"But penal servitude for ten or twenty years ain't much better."

"Some men think it's worse," replied Gorman, with a savage grin; "but you've no need to fear. If you only take the right precautions it's impossible to find it out, an' I'll engage to put ye up to doin' it in such a way that there won't be a scrap the size of a sixpence left to convict you. Only put a bold face on it and the thing's done, and your fortune made as well as mine."

The man's voice and manner softened a little as he said this, for he thought he perceived symptoms of wavering in his tenant, who covered his face with his large thin hands and sighed deeply.

"Come, don't be hard on me," he said at length; "I really haven't got courage to go through with this. Only give me a little more time, and I'll—"

"Very good," interrupted Gorman, with an oath, as he rose and dashed his pipe into fragments on the hearth; "if you won't burn yourself out o' this scrape."

"Hush! hush, man!" said Boone in a hoarse whisper; "not so loud; my lad will hear you. Come, I'll think of it."

"Will you *do* it?" demanded the other fiercely. "You know the alternative if you don't?"

"Ruination?"

"Exactly so; and that without delay."

"Ruination either way," murmured Boone sadly to himself, as though he were counting the cost.

"Tut, man," said his landlord, becoming more gentle, "it's nothing of the sort. If you only take my advice, it'll be a jolly blaze, which, instead of ending in smoke will end in some thousands of pounds and commencing business again on fresh capital. Come, I've not got time to waste with you. There's no escape for you, so you'd better say yes, else I'll go and have a talk with a legal friend of mine who is used to screwing gold out of most unpromising mines."

David Boone's face had by this time become so pale that it could not become paler, so it turned somewhat green instead. His teeth, too,

had a tendency to chatter when he spoke, but by a strong mental effort he prevented this, and said in a subdued voice that he was willing to do whatever his landlord pleased to command.

"That's all right," said Gorman, resuming his seat in front of the fire; "now you speak like a man. Sit down and I'll go over the matter with you, and make your mind easy by showing you that it ain't either a difficult or risky piece of work. Bless you, it ain't the first time I've been up to that sort o' thing."

It did not require the diabolical leer that accompanied this remark to convince his hearer of its truth.

"Now, then," said Gorman, with a business air, "first of all, how stands the stock in the shop?"

"Rather low," answered Boone, who had reseated himself on the stool; "in fact, I've got little or nothing more than what is visible. I've bin so hard-up of late that I've had to crowd everything into view an' make the most of appearances. All the dressed dolls has got their frocks spread out, and the undressed ones their arms an' legs throwed about to make 'em take up as much room as possible. The lids of all the work boxes is open, the slates and puzzle boxes stuck up in single rows, with their broadsides to the front, and the collapsin' worlds is all inflated. Everything in the front is real, but all behind is sham dummies an' empty boxes."

Gorman opened his eyes a little on hearing this.

"Good," he said, after a pause; "you're a cleverer fellow than I took you for. I thought you was well off, and I'm sure the neighbours think the same, for the place looks pretty full an' thrivin'. I suppose, now, if it was all sold off you wouldn't have enough to pay up my loans?"

"Nothink like it," said Boone earnestly. "I've slaved night and day, an' done my best, but luck's again' me."

"Ah, that's 'cause you've bin faint-hearted in time past; you're goin' to be bold in time to come, my good fellow; you'll have to be bold, you will. Come, I'll explain how. But first, let me ask how much you think the stock is worth."

"Not much above fifty pounds."

"Hum! it looks like more."

"That's true, an' the people about think it's worth two or three hundred, for you see I have a lot o' cheap jewellery, and some of the inquisitive ones have been trying to pump me of late. They all think I'm thriving," said Boone, shaking his head sorrowfully.

"So you are, so you are, man," said Gorman jocosely, "and you're going to make your fortune soon, and so am I, though at present I'm poor enough. However, that don't matter. Here's your course for the future, which you're to steer by. You'll go an' begin chatting with your neighbours at odd times, and your conversation, curiously enough, will always be about the times bein' better than usual, an' about the approach of Christmas, an' the stock you mean to lay in against that festive season. After that you'll lay in the stock—fifty pounds' worth; and it won't be sham; it'll be real—"

"But where is the money to come from?" asked Boone.

"Oh, don't you trouble about the money; I'll provide that. I've a curious power of raisin' the wind on easy terms. Fifty pounds' worth of real goods will be bought by you, my thriving shopman, and you'll let some of the neighbours, partiklerly these same inquisitive 'uns, see the goods and some of the invoices, and you'll tell them that you've laid in 150 pounds worth of stock, and that you think of layin' in more. On the strength of the press o' business you'll get another shop-lad, and you'll keep 'em employed a good deal goin' messages, so that they won't get to know much about the state o' things, and I'll take care to send you a rare lot o' customers, who'll come pretty often for small purchases, and give the shop an uncommon thrivin' look. Oh, we'll make a splendid appearance of doin' business, and we'll have lots of witnesses ready to bother these sharp lawyers if need be—won't we, Boone?"

Poor Boone, whose colour had not yet improved much, smiled in a ghastly way, but said nothing.

"Well, then," resumed Gorman, after a few minutes' meditation, "when this thriving trade is in full swing we'll get it insured. You know it would never do to risk the loss of such valuable stock by

fire—eh, Boone? common prudence pints that out! You say what you have is worth fifty, and what you'll lay in is fifty more, makin' a hundred, so we'll insure for five hundred; there's a clear gain of four hundred per cent, only think of that! Well, the house I have already insured for five hundred, that makes nine hundred, and we'll insure the furniture and fixings for fifty; that'll look business-like, you know. Then the goods laid in will be carefully removed in the night at various times before the fire, so you had better see that they are small and portable objects; that'll make another fifty pounds, if not more. So I see my way to a thousand pounds. That's a neat sum, ain't it, Boone?"

Still Boone made no reply, but favoured his visitor with another ghastly smile.

"Well, then," pursued Gorman, "all you've got to do is, on a certain night that I will fix, to set the shop alight, and the thing's done quite easy. But that's not all. You've got an old mother, I believe; well, it would be very unnatural in you to run the risk of being burned to death, an' leaving her penniless; so you'll insure your life for five hundred pounds, and I'll pay the first premium on it, and then you'll die—"

"Die!" exclaimed Boone, with a start.

"Ay; why not, if you're to get a small fortune by it."

"But how's that to be managed?" inquired Boone, with a look of doubt.

"Managed? Nothing easier. You'll be so desperately upset by the fire—perhaps singed a little too—that you'll be taken ill and won't get better. I'll look carefully after you as your loving friend, and when you're about dead you'll get up and clear off in a quiet way. I'll make arrangements to have a corpse as like you as possible put in your bed, and then you'll be buried comfortably, and we'll share the insurance. Of course you'll have to leave this part of the town and disguise yourself, but that won't be difficult. Why, man, if you were only fond of a joke you might even attend your own funeral! It's not the first time that sort of thing has bin done. So, then, you'll have your life insured, but not yet. Your first business is to set about the purchase of the stock, and, let me tell you, there's no time to lose, so I

advise you to write out the orders this very night. I'll fetch you fifty pounds in a day or two, and you'll pay up at once. It'll look well, you know, and after it's all settled we'll divide the plunder. Now then, good-night. I congratulate you on your thriving business."

Gorman opened the door of the inner room as he said the last words, so that the lad in the shop might hear them. As he passed through the shop he whispered in his friend's ear, "Mind the consequences if you fail," and then left him with another hearty good-night.

Poor David Boone, having sold himself to the tempter, went about his duties like an abject slave. He began by ordering goods from various wholesale dealers in the city, after which he took occasion to stand a good deal at his shop door and accost such of his neighbours as chanced to pass. The conversation at such times invariably began with the interesting topic of the weather, on which abstruse subject Boone and his friends displayed a surprising profundity of knowledge, by stating not only what the weather was at the time being, and what it had been in time past, but what it was likely to be in time to come. It soon diverged, however, to business, and usually ended in a display of fresh goods and invoices, and in references, on the part of Boone, to the felicitous state of trade at the time.

Do what he would, however, this thriving tradesman could not act his part well. In the midst of his prosperity his smiles were ghastly and his laughter was sardonic. Even when commenting on the prosperity of trade his sighs were frequent and deep. One of his friends thought and said that prosperity was turning the poor man's brain. Others thought that he was becoming quite unnatural and unaccountable in his deportment; and a few, acting on the principle of the sailor's parrot, which "could not speak much, but was a tremendous thinker," gave no outward indication of their thoughts beyond wise looks and grave shakes of the head, by which most people understood them to signify that they feared there was a screw loose somewhere.

This latter sentiment, it will be observed, is a very common one among the unusually wise ones of the earth, and is conveniently safe, inasmuch as it is more or less true of every person, place, and thing in this sad world of loose screws.

Chapter Twenty.

A little more Hatching.

One night Edward Hooper, having consulted his watch frequently, and compared it with the clock of slow notoriety in the warehouse in Tooley Street, until his patience was almost gone, at last received the warning hiss, and had his books shut and put away before the minute-gun began to boom. He was out at the door and half-way up the lane, with his hat a good deal on one side of his head and very much over one eye, before the last shot was fired.

"It's a jolly time of day this—the jolliest hour of the twenty-four," muttered Ned to himself, with a smile.

His speech was thick, and his smile was rather idiotic, by reason of his having drunk more than his usual allowance at dinner that day.

By way of mending matters, Ned resolved to renew his potations immediately, and announced his intentions to himself in the following words:

"Com—mi—boy—y–you'll go—ave an—urrer por-o-porer—thash yer sort!"

At a certain point in the drunkard's downward career he ceases to have any control over himself, and increases his speed from the usual staggering jog-trot to a brisk zigzag gallop that generally terminates abruptly in the grave.

Ned Hooper, a kind-hearted fellow enough, and thinking himself not so bad as he seemed because of that same kind-heartedness, had reached the galloping point, and was travelling unusually fast along the high road to ruin.

Being of a generous nature, Ned was in the habit of extending his patronage to various beer-shops, among others to that one near London Bridge which has been described as the property of Gorman. Business, pleasure, or fancy led him to that shop on the evening in question. He was standing at the counter steadying himself with his left hand and holding a pewter-pot in his right, when the door of the

inner room opened, and Gorman crossed the floor. He was in a thoughtful mood, and was about to pass out without raising his eyes, when Ned arrested him with:

"Good ev-n'in', Misher Gorm'n."

Gorman glanced back, and then turned away as if in contempt, but, suddenly checking himself, returned, and going up to Hooper with as affable a smile as his countenance would admit of, said that he was delighted to shake hands with him, and that he was the very man he wanted to see, as he wished to have a word of conversation with him.

"Conv'shas'n wi' me?" said Ned, swaying himself to and fro as he endeavoured to look steadily in the face of his friend; "fire away, shen. I'm sh' man f'r conv'shash'n, grave or gay, comic—'r—shublime, 's all the shame to me!"

He finished the pot, and laid it, with an immense assumption of care, on the counter.

"Come out, we'll walk as we talk," said Gorman.

"Ha! to b'shure; 'at's poetical—very good, very good, we'll wa–alk as we talk—ha! ha! very good. Didn't know you wash a poet—eh? don't look like 'un."

"Come along, then," said Gorman, taking him by the arm.

"Shtop!" said Ned, drawing himself up with an air of drivelling dignity, and thrusting his hand into his trouser-pocket.

"What for?" asked the other.

"I haven't p–paid for my b–beer."

"Never mind the beer. I'll stand that," said Gorman, dragging his friend away.

Ned consented to be dragged, and said something to the effect that he hoped to have the pleasure of standing treat on some future occasion.

"Now, then," said Gorman, somewhat firmly, though not sternly, for he knew that Ned Hooper was not to be browbeat; "are you sober enough to attend to what I've got to say?"

"Shober as a dudge," answered Ned.

Gorman looked earnestly in his face for a few moments, and then began to talk to him in a continuous strain by way of testing him.

"C'found these cabs an' b–busseses; a feller c–can't hear a word," said Ned.

"Your lodgin's an't far off, are they?"

"Close 't 'and," answered Ned.

"Let's go to 'em," said Gorman.

In silence Ned Hooper led the way, and, conducting his friend into his "chamber," as he styled his poor abode, begged him to be seated, and threw himself into an armchair beside the little fire. There was a pipe on the chimney-piece, which Ned began to fill, while Gorman opened the conversation.

"You're hard up, rather, just now?" said the latter.

"'Xactly so, that's my c'ndition to a tee."

Ned smiled as he said this, as though it were the most satisfactory state of things possible, and lighted his pipe.

"Of course you've no objection to make a fifty pound note or so?" asked Gorman.

"None in sh' wo'ld; always," he became very earnest here, "*always* sh'posin' that I make it honestly."

"Of course, of course," rejoined the other; "I would never propose anything that would lead you into a scrape. You don't suppose I would do that, I hope?"

"Shertenly not," replied Ned with a smile; "fire away."

"Well, then, I'm anxious just now to procure a dead corpse."

Ned Hooper, drunk as he was, felt somewhat startled by this, but, being a man of wandering and lively imagination, turned from the point in question to an idea suggested by it.

"I sh'pose a living corpse wouldn't do, would it? It must be a dead one—eh?"

"Be serious if you can," said Gorman angrily. "I want a corpse."

Ned Hooper, who, like many good-humoured men, was easily roused when in a state of intoxication, fired at the tone of Gorman's voice, and looked at him as sternly as he could, while he replied:

"What have *I* got to do with yer wants an' yer co'pses—eh? You don't sh'pose I keep a stock of 'em on hand ready-made, do you—eh?" Then relapsing into a placid frame, he smiled, and added, "But fire away, ol' feller, I'm yer man for conv'sashin, specially w'en it's in the comic line."

"That's right," said Gorman, clapping Ned on the shoulder and endeavouring to conciliate him; "now, then, the question is, how am I to get 'un?"

"Ah, thash the question, if Shakspr's to be b'lieved."

"Well, but couldn't you think?" said Gorman.

"Think!" exclaimed the other, "what am I paid a salary for? What are my brains doin' night an day—eh? Of course I can think; thash's my pr'feshion, is thinking."

Gorman cast a scornful look at his friend, but he deemed it prudent to admit the truth of what he said, and suggested that he might

perhaps remember a certain medical student with whom he had once held pleasant converse in his (Gorman's) house of entertainment.

"R'member him, of course," hiccuped Ned.

"Well, then, he could get us a corpse, you know—couldn't he?"

Ned looked uncommonly knowing at this point, and admitted that he rather thought he could—a dozen of them, if necessary.

"Well, I want one, and I'll pay well for it if it's of the right sort. It must be at least six-foot two, thin about the jaws, with lanky black hair, and a yellow complexion."

Ned smiled facetiously, but at the same time shook his head.

"Six f't two," said he, "an't a common height; it won't be easy to get 'un so tall; but—but," he pondered here with a grave expression of countenance, "but it might be stretched a bit, you know—eh? As to thin jaws, most of 'em is thin about sh' jaws, an' black hair ain't un—uncommon."

Ned yawned at this point, and looked very sleepy.

"Well, you'll speak to him, won't you, and I'll make it worth while for both of you?"

"Oh yesh, I'll shpeak to him," said Ned, as his head fell on the table and his senses utterly forsook him.

"Bah! you beast," muttered Gorman, casting a glance of scorn on his friend as he rose to leave. He had the sense, before going, to extinguish the candle, lest Ned should overturn it and set the house on fire; not that he cared either for Ned or the house, but as the former happened to be necessary to him just then, he did not wish him to be burned too soon. Then he went out, closing the door softly after him.

Half an hour afterwards Ned's friend and fellow-lodger, John Barret, entered the room, accompanied by Fred Auberly.

"Come, Fred," said the former, "we can chat here without interr—hallo—"

"What's wrong?" inquired Fred, endeavouring to make out objects by the feeble flicker of the fire, while his friend struck a light.

Barret did not reply, but the light soon revealed Ned's disreputable figure half sprawling on and half clinging to the table.

"Surely this is not your chum, John?" asked Fred in surprise.

"Yes, that's him," answered Barret in a low sad voice. "Help me to get him into bed, like a good fellow."

Without a word the young men raised the drunken figure in their arms, and laid it like some loathsome object on one of the beds in the adjoining room.

"How can you stay with him?" asked Auberly, after they had returned to the other room and seated themselves at the fire.

"He is an old schoolfellow of mine," said Barret in a low voice. "I'm sorry you've seen him in this state. He was a very different fellow once, I assure you; and if it were not for that accursed drink he would be as pleasant a companion as exists. You know I have no friends in London save yourself, Fred, and this young fellow.—I came to stay with him at first, not knowing his character, and now I remain to try to—to—save him; but I fear his case is hopeless. Come, Fred, we won't talk of it. You were saying, as we came along, that your father is sterner than ever, were you not?"

"Ay," said Fred, with a sigh, "he won't even let me call to see my sister too—that's the worst of it. For the rest I care not; my brush has sustained me hitherto, and my love for my profession increases every hour. I feel towards it, John, as a man may be supposed to feel towards the sweet, young girl whom wicked guardians had for a long time refused to let him wed. Nothing but death shall separate us now!"

Barret smiled, and was about to make some rejoinder, but he checked himself and changed the subject.

"How is your sister?" said he, "I have not heard of her for a long time."

"Not well," answered Fred; "the doctors shake their heads and speak of the shock having been too much for her. Dear Loo, she never was strong, and I'm afraid that she has received fatal injury on the night of the fire. I'm told that my poor father is sadly cut up about her—attends on her night and day, and humours her every whim. This is so unlike him that it fills me with anxiety on account of dear Loo, whom I have not seen since I went to live at Kensington."

"Kensington, Fred? I did not know you had gone to live there."

"I was just going to mention that when we came in. I have got a very comfortable lodging with—who do you think? you'll never guess—Mrs Willders, the mother of our young friend Willie who works with old Tom Tippet upstairs. You may well look surprised. I came upon the lodging quite accidentally, and, finding that it suited my inclinations and my purse, I took it at once for a few weeks. It's in a very poor locality, no doubt, but you know a man must cut his coat according to his cloth, and my cloth is not broad at present. But then," continued Fred, with sudden animation, "it's a splendid place for a painter! There are such picturesque regions and bits near it. Why, Kensington Gardens are sufficient to make the fortune of a landscape-painter—at least in the way of trees; then an hour's walk takes you to rural scenery, or canal scenery, with barges, bridges, boats, old stores, cottages, etcetera. Oh! it's a magnificent spot, and I'm hard at work on a picturesque old pump near Shepherd's Bush Common, with a bit of old brick wall behind it, half-covered with ivy, and a gipsy-like beggar-girl drinking at it out of her hand; that—that'll make an impression, I think, on the Royal Academy, if—if *they take it in*."

"Ah! *if* they take it in," said John Barret, smiling.

"Well," retorted Fred Auberly, "I know that is a point of uncertainty, and I'm not very sanguine, because there is great lack of room. Nevertheless, I mean to send it. And you know, John, 'faint heart never won fair lady,' so—"

At this point the conversation was interrupted by a shrill whistle at the top of the house, which, as it drew nearer, became identified with the air of "Rule Britannia!"

"That's Willie Willders," said Barret, laughing.

"I guessed as much, and with your leave I'll call him in. He knows of my having become an inmate of his mother's house, and as he is probably going home I would like to send a message to his mother. Hallo, Willie."

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered the youth, in the tones of a thoroughbred seaman. Not that Willie had ever been at sea, but he was so fond of seamen, and had mingled with them so much at the docks, as well as those of them who had become firemen, that he tried to imitate their gait and tones.

"Come here, you scamp, and stop your noise."

"Certainly, sir," said Willie, with a grin, as he entered the room, cap in hand.

"Going home, lad?" asked Fred.

"Yes, sir—at least in a permiscuous sort of way entertainin' myself as I goes with agreeable talk, and improvin' obsarvation of the shop winders, etceterrer."

"Will you take a message to your mother?"

"Sure-ly," answered Willie.

"Well, say to her that I have several calls to make to-night and may be late in getting home, but she need not sit up for me as I have the door-key; tell her not to forget to leave the door on the latch."

"Wery good, sir," said Willie. "May I make so bold as to ask how Miss Loo was when you seed her last?"

"Not well, I regret to say," replied Fred.

"Indeed! I'm surprised to hear that, for she's agoin' out to tea to-morrow night, sir."

"My surprise is greater than yours, lad; how d'you know that, and where is she going to?" asked Auberly.

Here Willie explained in a very elaborate manner that a note had arrived that forenoon from Miss Tippet, inviting Mr Tippet to tea the following evening, and expressing a hope that he would bring with him his clerk, "*Mister*" Willders, the brother of the brave fireman who had saved Loo's life, and that Miss Louisa Auberly was to be there, and that Mr Tippet had written a note accepting the same.

"Then you'll have to take another message from me, Willie. Tell Miss Tippet when you go to-morrow that I will give myself the pleasure of looking in on her in the course of the evening," said Fred. "Mr Auberly is not to be there, is he?"

"No, not as I knows of."

"Well, good-night, Willie."

Willie took his departure, marching to the usual national air, and soon after Fred Auberly bade his friend good-night and left him.

Chapter Twenty One.

A Small Tea-Party.

Miss Tippet's tea-party began by the arrival of Willie Willders, who, being fond of society, and regardless of fashion, understood his hostess literally when she named her tea-hour! For full half an hour, therefore, he had the field to himself, and improved the occasion by entertaining Miss Tippet and Emma Ward with an account of the wonderful inventions that emanated from the fertile brain of Mr Thomas Tippet.

Strange to say, a deep and lasting friendship had sprung up between the eccentric old gentleman and his volatile assistant. Willie sympathised so fully with his master in his wild schemes, and displayed withal such an aptitude for mechanical contrivance, and such a ready appreciation of complex theories, that Mr Tippet soon came to forget his extreme youth, and to converse with him, propound schemes and new ideas to him, and even to ask his advice; with as much seriousness as though he had been a full-grown man.

This was of course very gratifying to Willie, who repaid his master's condescension and kindness by devoting himself heart and soul to the duties of what he styled his "profession." He was a good deal put out when his brother Frank asked him one day what his "profession" was, and resolving never again to be placed in such an awkward position of ignorance, asked his employer what was the name of his business, to which the employer replied that it had no particular name; but, on being urged by his assistant to give it a name, he suggested that he might, if so disposed, style himself a poly-artist, which, he explained, meant an artist of many occupations. Willie felt that this might be translated "jack-of-all-trades," but on mature consideration he resolved to adopt it, in the belief that few people would understand what it meant, and that thereby he would be invested with a halo of mystery, which was, upon the whole, a gratifying reflection.

Gradually, however, Willie was led to diverge from his employer to his brother Frank, in regard to whom Miss Tippet entertained the strongest feelings of admiration, because of his courageous conduct in saving Louisa Auberly. Willie pursued this theme all the more willingly that Emma appeared to be deeply interested in it.

Emma Ward was very romantic in her nature; yet she had a keen appreciation of the ludicrous,—which caused her to appear somewhat light-headed and giddy in the eyes of superficial observers; but she possessed an underlying earnestness of soul, which displayed itself in a thousand ways to those who had much intercourse with her. She was an ardent hero-worshipper; and while Miss Tippet was her heroine, Frank Willders was, at that time, her *beau idéal* of a hero, although she only knew him from description.

Willie was still in the middle of a glowing account of a fire, in which Frank and his friends Dale and Baxmore were the chief actors; and Emma was listening with heightened colour, parted lips, and sparkling eyes, when Matty Merryon opened the door and announced Mr Tippet.

That gentleman was still in the act of shaking his sister's hands with both of his, and kissing her on both cheeks heartily, when Matty announced Miss Deemas.

Matty, being Irish, allowed her soul to gush out too obviously in her tones; so that her feelings towards the Eagle, though unexpressed, were discernible.

Miss Deemas strode up to Miss Tippet, and pecked her on the right cheek, much as an eagle might peck a tender rabbit, which it could slay and devour if it chose, but which it preferred to spare for a time. She was immediately introduced to Mr Tippet, whom she favoured with a stiff bow, intended to express armed neutrality in the meantime; with a possibility, if not a probability, of war in the future. The eccentric gentleman felt chilled, but ventured to express an opinion in regard to the weather, glancing for confirmation of the same towards the window, through which he naturally enough expected to see the sky; but was baffled by only seeing the green venetian blinds, which ruled off the opposite houses in narrow stripes. Before he had recovered himself to make any further observation, Miss Deemas had attempted, in a condescending way, to peck the cheek of Emma Ward; but that young lady, feeling disinclined, so managed that she received the peck on her forehead.

On Willie, Miss Deemas bestowed a glance of utter indifference, which Willie replied to with a gaze of desperate defiance.

Then Miss Deemas seated herself on the sofa, and asked her "dear friend" how she did, and how she felt, and whether things in general were much as usual; from which elevated region of generalities she gradually descended into the more particular sphere of gossip and scandal.

It is only just to Miss Tippet to say that the Eagle did not find her a congenial bird of prey in this region. On the contrary, she had to drag her unwilling friend down into it; and as Miss Tippet was too conscientious and kind-hearted to agree with her in her sweeping censures and caustic observations and wilful misconstructions, it is difficult to conceive wherein she (the Eagle) found pleasure in her society. Probably it was because she found in her one who would submit meekly to any amount of contradiction, and listen patiently to any amount of vituperative declamation.

"So it seems Mr Auberly has disinherited and dismissed his son, my dear," said Miss Deemas, smoothing her dress with both hands, as though she were about to lay Mr Auberly in her lap, and analyse him.

"I'm sorry to say that it is too true, Julia," answered Miss Tippet, with a sigh.

"Ha! it's so like one of these creatures," said Miss Deemas, pursing her thin lips; "so domineering, so towering, in their pride of mere physical power."

Mr Tippet glanced at the Eagle in surprise, not being able to understand to what sort of "creatures" she made reference.

"Poor Frederick," sighed Miss Tippet, "I don't know what he'll do (ring the bell, Emma, darling); he's such a bold, high-spirited young man, and it's all owing to his determination to take to—to what's-'is-name as a profession (bring the tea, Matty). It's very sad."

"That must be a new sort of profession," observed Miss Deemas pointedly.

"Oh! I mean painting, you know. It's impossible to arrange one's things in such very correct language, you know, dear Julia; you are really too—oh! did you hear of Joe Corney, and what's-his—

fireman's visit to Mrs Denman? To be sure you did; I forgot it was in your house. It was such a funny account; you heard of it, brother (ring the bell again, dear), didn't you?"

Mr Tippet, whose wonted vivacity was quite subdued by the freezing influence of the Eagle, said that he had not heard of it; whereupon Miss Tippet said that she had heard of it, and so had Willie Willders, who had heard of it from his brother Frank, who had heard of it from Joe Corney himself; and then she attempted to relate the matter, but failed, and finally asked Willie to tell the story, which Willie did with much gusto; looking at Miss Deemas all the time, and speaking in a very positive tone, as if he thought she was doubting every word he said, and was resolved to hurl it in her teeth, whether she chose to believe it or not.

"Capital!" exclaimed Mr Tippet, laughing heartily, when Willie had concluded; "what an energetic old lady she must be! Really, I must get introduced to her, and show her the self-acting fire-extinguisher I have just invented. You remember it, Willie?" Willie nodded. "I've laid it aside for some time; but it is very nearly complete now. A little more work on it will finish it. My only difficulty in regard to it is, madam," he addressed himself to Miss Deemas here, "that it is apt to burst, and I am uncertain whether or not to add a safety-valve to prevent such a catastrophe, or to make the metal so very strong, that nothing short of gunpowder would burst it; but then, you see, that would make the whole affair too heavy. However, these are only minor difficulties of detail, which a little thought will overcome."

Miss Deemas received all this with a sinister smile, and replied with the single word, "Oh!" after which she turned immediately to Miss Tippet, and remarked that the weather had been unusually warm of late for the season of the year, which remark so exasperated Willie Willders that he turned with a face of crimson to Emma, and asked her if she didn't feel a draught of cold air coming over her from somewhere, and whether she would not sit nearer the fire, and farther away from the window!

Willie meant this for an uncommonly severe cut; for Miss Deemas sat at the end of the sofa, near the window!

Fortunately, at this point, Matty Merryon ushered in Loo Auberly, who was instantly enfolded in Miss Tippet's arms, and thence

transferred to Emma's, in which she was led to the sofa, and gently deposited in the softest corner.

"Darling Loo!" exclaimed Miss Tippet, with tears in her eyes; "you look *so* thin and pale."

There could be no doubt on that point. Little Loo, as Emma styled her, was worn to a shadow by sickness, which had hitherto baffled the doctor's skill. But she was a beautiful shadow; such a sweet, gentle shadow, that one might feel thankful, rather than otherwise, to be haunted by it.

"Pray don't mind me; I'm too tired to speak to you yet; just go on talking. I like to listen," said Loo softly.

With ready kindness, Miss Tippet at once sought to draw attention from the child, by reverting to Mrs Denman; and Matty created a little opportune confusion by stumbling into the room with the tea.

Matty usually tripped over the carpet at the door, and never seemed to become wiser from experience.

"Poor Mrs Denman," said Miss Tippet, pouring out the tea; "it must have been an awful shock; think of a (Sugar, brother? I always forget), what was I—oh, yes; think of a fireman seizing one round the (Cream, Willie? I know you have a sweet tooth, so I don't need to ask if you take sugar)—yes, he carried her down that dreadful what-d'ye-call-it, and into the next house with nothing (A little more sugar, Julia? No?)—nothing on but her what's-'is-name. Oh! it was sad; sad to lose all her fine things, too—her furniture, and—and thingumies. Do try a piece of cake, brother."

"I know a worse case than hers," said Willie, with a knowing look.

"Do you?" exclaimed Miss Tippet.

"Oh! do tell it," cried Emma earnestly; "he's just been telling it to me, and it is *so* sad and interesting."

"Come, let's hear about it, lad," said Mr Tippet.

Thus encouraged, Willie related his adventure with the clown's family, and told his tale with such genuine feeling, that Miss Tippet, Loo, and Emma found their eyes moist when he had concluded.

There was a good deal of comment upon this subject, and Miss Deemas animadverted very strongly upon actors in general and clowns in particular. As to ballet-girls, she could not find words to express her contempt for them; but in reference to this Miss Tippet ventured to rebuke her friend, and to say that although she could not and would not defend the position of these unfortunates, yet she felt that they were very much to be pitied, seeing that they were in many cases trained to their peculiarly indelicate life by their parents, and had been taught to regard ballet-dancing as quite a proper and legitimate what's-its-name. No doubt this was only a palliation of the life they led, but she thought that if anyone was to be severely blamed in the matter it was the people who went to witness and encourage such wicked displays.

Miss Deemas dissented generally from all her friend's observations, and, wishing to change the subject, asked Loo if her father was coming to fetch her home.

"No," said Loo; "dear papa is not well to-night, but he is to send the carriage for me. Oh, I wish," she continued, reverting to the previous subject, "I *wish* I could do something for these poor people. I'm so very, very sorry for the fairy."

"So you can, if you choose," said Miss Deemas sharply.

"No, indeed I cannot," replied Loo in an earnest voice; "I'm too ill and weak now to be of any use to anyone. Once I was useful to dear papa, but ever since the fire I have not been of use to anybody; only a hindrance to them. Since I have been ill I have thought much more about what I read in the Bible, and I've had a great desire to do good in some way or other, but how can I—so weak and helpless?"

Loo almost sobbed, for her sympathies had been awakened by Willie, and a chord had been touched which had been vibrating in her breast for some weeks past.

"Your father is rich, is he not?" asked the Eagle.

"Yes, I believe so."

"Well, a word to him may be the cause of much good, in the shape of money at least, to people in distress; but rich people don't always like to spend their money in that way."

Loo hung down her head and made no reply, for she knew that her father did not like to part with money. She had often heard him refuse to do so in days gone by, even when very pathetic appeals (as she thought) were made to him; and experience told her that it was in vain to look for help in that quarter.

The party was now increased by the arrival of Frederick Auberly, who at once infused life into everybody, except Miss Deemas, who had life enough of her own, and would by no means accept the loan of any from anyone else. Fred therefore ignored her altogether, and told stories and cracked jokes and sang songs as if no such female iceberg were present.

Poor Loo was overjoyed to see him, and laying her head on his breast, bade him speak away and not ask questions; only speak, and allow her to listen and rest.

Fred obeyed, and at once began an earnest discussion with Willie as to the best method of getting a stout gentleman out of a third-floor window in case of fire, when Matty Merryon entered with a flushed face and said that a fireman who would not give his name wished to see Willie Willders for a minute; and she was inclined to think it was his brother.

"What! Frank?" exclaimed Willie, rising to go downstairs.

"Stay, Willie," cried Miss Tippet eagerly; "don't go down. Pray let me have him up; I should so like to see him, and I'm sure so would Loo; the man, you know, who went up the what's-its-name, and brought you—yes, send him up, Matty."

"Plaze, mim, he won't come," replied the girl, "I know'd ye would like to see him, an' axed him in."

"Tell him," said Miss Tippet, "that I request it as a favour."

While Matty was delivering this message, the Eagle took occasion to sniff once or twice in a contemptuous manner, and wondered why people worshipped men just because they happened to be big, and what they called handsome. For her part, she hated all men, but if she were to be obliged to choose between any class (which she was thankful to say was *not* necessary in her case), she would certainly give the preference to ugly men and small.

Willie Willders nodded his head approvingly, and, being exasperated into a savage serio-comic condition, as well by the Eagle's voice and aspect as by her sentiments, he said that she was quite right, and that if *he* were a lady like her he would hold the same opinions, because then, said he, "being stout, I could wallop my husband an' keep him down, an' the contrast of his ugly face with mine would not be so obvious."

Frank's step on the stair fortunately prevented this open and desperate attack being noticed. Next moment all turned their eyes in breathless expectation towards the door.

Being on duty, Frank appeared in fireman's costume, with the sailor-like undress cap in his hand. He bowed to the company, and apologised to Miss Tippet for intruding, but he had wished to ask his brother Willie to call at the fire station on his way home to convey a letter to his mother, and merely meant to see him at the door.

"I'm *very* glad you came, Mr Willders," said Miss Tippet, "for I assure you we all regard you as the preserver of our dear Miss Auberly's life when you went up the—the—thing. Here she is. You must shake—that's it—so nice!"

The last part of Miss Tippet's remark referred to Loo stretching out her hand to Frank, who advanced promptly and shook it with great tenderness. He then shook hands with Fred, who expressed his regard for him in warm terms; also with Mr Tippet, who paid him some enthusiastic compliments, and said something to the effect that the parent stem from which two such branches as he and Willie had grown must be a prime plant.

As he turned from Mr Tippet—who, being very short, appeared to be looking up at a steeple while he delivered this opinion—Frank's eyes encountered those of Emma Ward, who was gazing at him in

such undisguised admiration, that, being a somewhat bashful man, he felt a little confused, and dropped his eyes, figuratively, on the floor. Emma blushed scarlet with shame at being caught in this way, and thereafter became rigidly grave and indifferent.

When Frank again raised his eyes—which, by the way, he did immediately—they encountered the eagle glance of Miss Deemas frowning defiance on him, as being a sort of type or pattern specimen of his highly objectionable race. Had Miss Deemas been a man (which would have gratified her more than she could have expressed) Frank could have met the frown with a smile of pity. As it was, he turned to the little eager countenance of Miss Tippet, and felt deeper respect than ever for the sex; thus showing that just as an exception proves a rule, so an unfavourable contrast strengthens a cause.

"Pray sit down, Mr Willders," entreated Miss Tippet earnestly; "I should like *so* much to hear how you did it from your own lips, and how you can possibly venture up such dreadful things, just like going up the outside of the Monument. Dear Loo, and you came down it, too; but, to be sure, your eyes were shut, which was as well, for you were only in your night— Ah, well, yes, *do* sit down Mr Firem——Willders, I mean."

Frank thanked her, but declined, on the ground that he was on duty, and that he feared he was doing wrong in even looking in on them for the few minutes he had stayed. "Good-night, ma'am," he continued, "good-night. You'll call at the station on your way home, Willie?"

Willie said he would, and then all the company, excepting the Eagle, shook hands with the stalwart fireman, looking up at him as if he were a hero just returned from the proverbial "hundred fights." Even Emma Ward condescended to shake hands with him at parting.

"Perhaps you'll be in the middle of a fire this very night," cried Tom Tippet, following him to the door.

"It is quite possible," said Frank, with a smile.

Miss Deemas was heard to snort contemptuously at this.

"Perhaps you may even save more lives!" cried Miss Tippet.

"It may be so," answered Frank, again smiling, but evidently feeling anxious to make his escape, for he was not one of those men who like to be lionised.

"Only think!" exclaimed Miss Tippet as Frank quitted the room.

"Ha!" ejaculated the Eagle, in a tone which was meant to convey her well-known opinion that women would do such things quite as well as men if their muscles were a little stronger.

It is but justice to Miss Deemas to explain that she did not champion and exalt women out of love to her sex. Love was not one of her strong points. Rampant indignation against those whom she bitterly termed "lords of creation" was her strong tower of refuge, in which she habitually dwelt, and from the giddy summit of which she hurled would-be destruction on the doomed males below. Among her various missiles she counted the "wrongs of her sex" the most telling shaft, and was in consequence always busy sharpening and polishing and flourishing this dread weapon in the eyes of her friends as well as her enemies, although, of course, she only launched it at the latter.

Perched on her self-exalted eyrie, Miss Deemas did not know that there was a pretty large number of her own sex in the comparatively humble multitude below, who, while they clearly recognised the "wrongs of women" (and preferred to call them "misfortunes") did not attribute them solely, or even largely, to the wickedness of men, but to the combined wickedness and folly of society in general, and who were of opinion that such matters were to be put right by patient, persevering, laborious, and persistent efforts on the part of men and women acting in concert, and not by the unwomanly acts and declamation of ladies of the Deemas stamp, whom they counted the worst enemies of the good cause—some wittingly, others unwittingly so. These people among the comparatively humble multitude below, also had the penetration to perceive that the so-called "wrongs" did not lie all on one side, but that there was a pretty large class of the so-called "lords" who went about the world habitually in a sad and disgraceful state of moral semi-nakedness, in consequence of their trousers having been appropriated and put on by their better-halves, and that therefore it was only meet that men

and women should be united (as indeed they were from the first intended to be) in their efforts to put each other's "wrongs" to "rights."

In addition to all this, these weak-minded (shall we call them?) people, moving in the comparatively humble multitude below, entertained the belief that rising in antagonism to the male sex in this matter was not only unnecessary and unjust and impolitic, but also ungenerous, for they reflected with much calm satisfaction that the "lords" are, after all, "under woman's control."

But Miss Deemas and all the ladies of the Eagle stamp did not think so. They did not believe that a strong mind means a mind strong enough to exercise its own powers to the ascertainment and reception of truth and the rejection of falsehood and fallacy; strong enough, under the influence of God's love, to perceive the paths of duty in all their ramifications, and to resolve to follow them. They did not believe that a high spirit, in the true sense of the word, meant a spirit broken down altogether and brought into subjection to its owner's, not another's, will. By no means. A strong mind with the Deemas-eagles meant unutterable and unalterable obstinacy, blind as a bat, with the great guns blazing all round, and the colours nailed to the mast. High spirit with them meant the inclination—ever present, always strong, and often asserted—to seize all the rest of the world, male and female, and lead it by the nose!

The Deemas-eagles as a class receive ready-made opinions, fabricated by someone else, and call them their own—receiving them originally and holding them subsequently, not because they are true, but because they are pleasant to their eyes and sweet to their taste. They hold them stoutly, too, probably because, having no foundation, they would be apt to fall and get broken if not upheld.

Having said thus much in behalf of the Deemas eagles, we now dismiss them, with an apology to the reader.

Chapter Twenty Two.

A Fireman's Life.

The clocks were striking nine when Frank issued from Miss Tippet's dwelling and walked briskly away. On turning a corner he came upon one of the numerous fire-escapes that nightly rear their tall heads against the houses all over London, in a somewhat rampant way, as though they knew of the fires that were about to take place, and, like mettlesome war-horses, were anxious to rush into action without delay.

On the pavement, close by the escape, stood a small sentry-box, and the moment Frank came in sight of it he remembered that it was the nocturnal habitation of his friend Conductor Samuel Forest. Sam himself was leaning his arms on the lower half of his divided door, and gazing contemplatively along the street.

"Well, Sam, what news?" inquired Frank as he came up.

"That you, Willders?" said Sam, a quiet smile of recognition playing on his good-humoured features. "I thought it must be the giant they're exhibitin' in Saint James's Hall just now, takin' a stroll at night to escape the boys. Why, when do you mean to stop growing?"

"I don't mean to interfere with Nature at all," replied Frank; "and I believe the world will be big enough to hold me, whatever size I grow to."

"Well, what's the news?" inquired Sam, emerging from his narrow residence, and proving in the act, that, though not quite so tall as his friend, he was one who required a pretty fair share of room in the world for himself.

"Nothing particular," said Frank, leaning against the escape; "only a chimney and a cut-away affair last night, and a false alarm and a first-floor burnt out the day before."

"How's Thompson?" asked Forest.

"Poorly, I fear," said Frank, with a shake of his head. "The sprained ankle he got when he fell off the folding-board is getting well, but the injury to his spine from the engine is more serious."

"Ah! poor fellow!" said Forest, "he's just a little too reckless. How came he by the sprain?"

"It was in the basement of a bookbinder's in Littleton Street," said Frank, lighting a cigar. "We got the call about 11 p.m., and on getting there found three engines at work. Mr Braidwood ordered our fellows to go down into the basement. It was very dark, and so thick of smoke that I couldn't see half-an-inch before my nose. We broke through the windows, and found ourselves ankle-deep in water. The engines had been at work flooding the place for some time, and there was more water than we expected; but we had got on the folding-boards without knowing it, an' before we knew where we were, down went Thompson into water four feet deep. I think myself some of the water-pipes had burst. He rose gasping, and I caught him by the collar and hauled him out. It was in trying to recover himself when he fell that he got the sprain. You've heard how he came by the other mishap?"

"Yes, it was gallopin' down Ludgate Hill, wasn't it?"

"Ay; the engine went over a barrow, and the jolt threw him off, and before he got up it was on him. By good fortune it did not go over him; it only bruised his back; but it's worse than we thought it would be, I fear."

"Ah! one never knows," said Forest gravely. "There's one man Jackson, now, only two weeks ago he was up in a third floor in Lambeth, and had brought down two women and a child, and was in the back-rooms groping for more, when the floor above gave way and came down on him. We all thought he was done for, but some of the beams had got jammed, and not five minutes after he steps out of a window all right—only a scratch or two, not worth mentioning; yet that same man fell down a flight of stairs at the same fire, with a boy on his shoulder, and sprained his ankle so bad that he's bin laid up for three weeks; but he saved the boy."

"Ah! it was worth the sprain," said Frank.

"It was," responded Forest.

"Well, good-night," said Frank, resuming his walk.

Samuel Forest responded "good-night," and then, getting into his box, sat down on its little seat, which was warranted not to hold two, trimmed the lamp that hung at his side, and, pulling out a book from a corner, began to peruse it.

Sam was of a literary turn of mind. He read a great deal during his lonely watches, and used often to say that some of his happiest hours were those spent in the dead of night in his sentry-box. His helmet hung on a peg beside him. His hatchet was in his girdle, and a small cap covered his head. Looking at him in his snug and brightly illuminated little apartment, he appeared—by contrast with the surrounding darkness—inexpressibly comfortable. Nevertheless, Sam Forest could have told you that appearances are often deceptive, and that no matter how it looked, his box was but a cold habitation on a biting December night.

While deeply immersed in his book, Sam heard the sound of approaching footsteps, and pricked up his ears. He was a good judge of such sounds. As they drew near, he quietly took off his cap, put on his helmet, and stepped from his box. The street was very silent; and, perhaps, not one of the hundreds of sleepers there thought of the solitary man who held vigil, and was so alert to do them service, if the hour of their extremity should come.

But a cry arose that startled them— "Fire! fire!!"

Another moment, and two men dashed round the corner, yelling at the top of their voices. Gasping for breath, they named the locality. Almost before they had done so, two policemen were on the spot, and in another moment the fire-escape was in motion. Instructed by the conductor, the two strangers and the policemen lent their willing aid. Before ten minutes had passed, the tall machine was run up to a burning house, the lower part of which was blazing; while, from the upper windows, frantic cries were heard for help, and sundry figures in dishabille were seen waving their arms. The escape was run up, and one after another the inmates were rescued from their perilous position.

While this scene was enacting Frank was pursuing his way to the Regent Street Fire Station; but news of the fire got there before him. He arrived just in time to don his helmet and take his place on the engine. Away they went, and in ten minutes after the arrival of the fire-escape, they dashed up, almost running into an engine which appeared from an opposite direction.

The fire was blazing brightly by this time, and the whole neighbourhood was in a state of commotion and excitement.

The two engines were got to work with as little delay as possible. A body of police kept the gathering crowd back, and soon volumes of steam began to mingle with the black smoke of the burning building. The superintendent was early on the scene, and he directed Frank and another fireman to try to persuade the people in the adjoining houses to remain quiet, and not throw their furniture over the window; but this, some of them would not consent to do. It was plain that one or two were mad with fear and excitement; and as the ruling passion is strong in death, so it would seem to be by no means weak in the midst of danger from fire; for many of them bent their whole energies to the saving of their goods and chattels—regardless of their lives.

One stout old gentleman, in particular, was seen at a third-floor window, heaving out chairs and stools and books, and small tables, and clocks, and even quantities of crockery, with desperate energy, to the great danger of the onlookers, at whose feet the various articles fell, and were dashed to atoms!

Frank darted up the stairs that led to this man's apartments, and burst in upon him.

"Oh! come along, fireman; help me to save my things," he exclaimed, as he struggled with superhuman efforts to thrust a table through the window, which was too small to permit its passage.

"Stop, sir, are you mad?" cried Frank sternly.

"Help me! help me! Oh! fireman, it will be all burned. Fire! fire! fire!!!"

His voice rose into a fierce yell, as he strove in vain with the table.

"You're quite safe," cried Frank, holding him; "*your* house ain't alight, and the engines have got it almost under."

But Frank spoke to deaf ears; so he coolly lifted the man in his arms, carried him kicking downstairs, and placed him in charge of a policeman.

Just then, a cry was raised that there were two kegs of gunpowder in one of the shops on the ground floor. The owner of the shop came up in a frantic state, and corroborated this statement.

"It'll blow the house to bits, sir," he said to Mr Braidwood.

"Of course it will," remarked the latter in a quiet voice. "Come here, my man," he added, taking the shopkeeper apart from the crowd, and questioning him closely.

Immediately after, he ordered the engines to play on a particular part of the building.

Just then, Frank came up to the superintendent.

"There's gunpowder in the back-shop somewhere, I'm told, sir; shall I go in for it?"

"No, Willders; you couldn't find it in the smoke. Take the branch, lad, and get up into that window above the door."

Frank sprang to obey. At the same time, Mr Braidwood suddenly seized a horse-cloth, and dashed in through the smoke. In a few seconds, he returned with one of the kegs of powder in his arms. Giving it to one of his men, he darted in again, and speedily re-issued with the second keg of powder, amid the frantic cheering of the crowd. Having done this, he continued to superintend the men until the fire was got under, which was soon accomplished, having been attacked promptly and with great vigour soon after it broke out.

"You needn't wait, Mr Dale," said Braidwood, going up to his foreman. "It's all safe now. I'll keep one engine; but you and your lads get off to your beds as fast as ye can."

Dale obeyed, and a few minutes after, the engine was galloping homewards.

Willie Willders was in the station when it arrived, and so was Fred Auberly, who, having accompanied Willie, had got into such an interesting talk with the sub-engineer in charge, that he forgot time, and was still in animated conversation when the wheels were heard in the distance.

The three were out at the door in an instant.

On came the engine, the horses' feet and the wheels crashing harshly in the silent night. They came round the corner with a sharp swing. Either the driver had become careless, or he was very sleepy that night, for he dashed against an iron post that stood at the corner, and carried off two wheels. The engine went full thirty yards on the two off-wheels, before it came to the ground, which it did at last with a terrific crash, throwing the firemen violently to the ground.

The sub-engineer and Fred and Willie sprang forward in great alarm; but the most of the men leaped up at once, and one or two of them laughed, as if to show that they had got no damage. But one of them lay extended on the pavement. It needed not a second glance to tell that it was Frank Willders.

"Lift him gently, lads," said Dale, who was himself severely bruised.

"Stop," exclaimed Frank in a low voice; "I've got no harm except to my left leg. It's broken, I think. There's no use of lifting me till you get a cab. I'll go straight home, if—" He fainted as he spoke.

"Run for a cab, Willie," said Fred Auberly.

Willie was off in a moment. At the same instant, a messenger was despatched for Dr Offley, and in a short time after that, Frank Willders was lying on his mother's sofa, with his left leg broken below the knee.

Chapter Twenty Three.

Mr James Auberly.

With a very stiff cravat, and a dreadfully stiff back, and a painfully stiff aspect, Mr James Auberly sat by the side of a couch and nursed his sick child.

Stiff and starched and stern though he was, Mr Auberly, had a soft point in his nature, and this point had been reached at last, for through all the stiffness and starch there shone on his countenance an expression of deep anxiety as he gazed at Loo's emaciated form.

Mr Auberly performed the duties of a nurse awkwardly enough, not being accustomed to such work, but he did them with care and with an evident effort to please, which made a deep impression on the child's heart.

"Dear papa," she said, after he had given her a drink and arranged her coverings. "I want you to do me a favour." She said this timidly, for she knew from past experience that her father was not fond of granting favours, but since her illness he had been so kind to her that she felt emboldened to make her request.

"I will do it, dear," said the stiff man, bending, morally as well as physically, as he had never bent before—for the prospect of Loo's death had been presented to him by the physicians. "I will do it, dear, if I can, and if the request be reasonable."

"Oh, then, do forgive Fred, and let him be an artist!" cried Loo, eagerly stretching out one of her thin hands.

"Hush, darling," said Mr Auberly, with a look of distress; "you must not excite yourself so. I have forgiven Fred long ago, and he has become an artist in spite of my objections."

"Yes, but let him come home, I mean, and be happy with us again as he used to be, and go to the office with you," said Loo.

Mr Auberly replied somewhat coldly to this that Fred was welcome to return home if he chose, but that his place in the office had been

filled up. Besides, it was impossible for him to be both a painter and a man of business, he said, and added that Loo had better not talk about such things, because she did not understand them. All he could say was that he was willing to receive Fred, if Fred was willing to return. He did not say, however, that he was willing to restore Fred to his former position in regard to his fortune, and as Loo knew nothing about her brother having been disinherited, she felt that she must be satisfied with this cold concession.

"Can you not ask some other favour, such as I could grant?" said Mr Auberly, with a smile, which was not nearly so grim as it used to be before "the fire." (The family always talked of the burning of Mr Auberly's house as "the fire," to the utter repudiation of all other fires—the great one of monumental fame included.)

Loo meditated some time before replying.

"Oh, yes," she exclaimed suddenly, "I *have* another favour to ask. How stupid of me to forget it. I want you very much to go and see a fairy that lives—"

"A fairy, Loo!" said Mr Auberly, while a shade of anxiety crossed his face. "You—you are rather weak just now; I must make you be quiet, and try to sleep, if you talk nonsense, dear."

"It's not nonsense," said Loo, again stretching out the thin hand, which her father grasped, replaced under the coverings, and held there; "it's quite true, papa," she continued energetically! "it *is* a fairy I want you to go and see—she's a pantomime fairy, and lives somewhere near London Bridge, and she's been very ill, and is so poor that they say she's dying for want of good food."

"Who told you about her, Loo?"

"Willie Willders," she replied, "he has been to see her and her father the clown a good many times."

Mr Auberly, frowned, for the name of Willie Willders did not sound pleasantly in his ears.

"*Do* go to see her, pray, dear papa," pleaded Loo with much earnestness, "and give her some money. You know that darling

mamma said, just before she was taken away," (the poor child persistently refused to use the expression "when she died"), "she wanted you to take me sometimes to see poor people when they were sick, and I've often thought of that since—especially when I have come to the verse in my Bible which tells me to 'consider the poor,' and I have often—oh, so very often—longed to go, but you were always so busy, dear papa, that you never had time, you know," (the stiff man winced a little at this) "but you seem to have more time now, papa, and although I'm too weak to go with you, I thought I would ask you to go to see this poor fairy, and tell her I will go to see her some day—if—if God makes me strong again."

The stiff man winced still more at this, but it was only a momentary wince, such as a man gives when he gets a sudden and severe twinge of toothache. It instantly passed away. Still, as in the case of toothache, it left behind an uneasy impression that there might be something very sharp and difficult to bear looming in the not distant future.

Mr Auberly had covered his face with his hand, and leant his elbow on the head of the couch. Looking up quickly with a smile—still tinged with grimness, for evil habits and their results are not to be got rid of in a day—he said:

"*Well*, Loo, I will go to see this fairy if it will please you; but somewhere near London Bridge is not a very definite address."

"Oh, but Willie Willders knows it," said Loo.

"But where is Willie Willders?" objected her father.

"Perhaps at home; perhaps at Mr Tippet's place."

"Well, we shall soon find out," said Mr Auberly, rising and ringing the bell.

Hopkins answered the summons.

Stiff, thin, tall, sedate, powdered, superfine Hopkins, how different from the personage we saw but lately plunging like a maniac at the fire-bell! Could it have been thee, Hopkins? Is it possible that anything so spruce, dignified, almost stately, could have fallen so

very low? We fear it is too true, for human nature not unfrequently furnishes instances of tremendous contrast, just as material nature sometimes furnishes the spectacle of the serene summer sky being engulfed in the black thunderstorm!

"Hopkins!" said Mr Auberly, handing him a slip of paper, "go to this address and ask for the boy William Willders; if he is there, bring him here immediately; if not, find out where he is, search for him, and bring him here without delay. Take a cab."

Hopkins folded the paper delicately with both his little fingers projecting very much, as though they wished it to be distinctly understood that they had no connection whatever with the others, and would not on any account assist the low-born and hard-working forefingers and thumbs in such menial employment. Hopkins's nose appeared to be affected with something of the same spirit. Then Hopkins bowed—that is to say, he broke across suddenly at the middle, causing his stiff upper man to form an obtuse angle with his rigid legs for one moment, recovered his perpendicular—and retired.

Oh! Hopkins, how difficult to believe that thy back was once as round as a hoop, and thy legs bent at acute angles whilst thou didst lay violent hands on—well, well; let bygones be bygones, and let us all, in kindness to thee, learn the song which says—

"Teach, O teach me to forget."

Hailing a cab with the air of six emperors rolled into one, Hopkins drove to Mr Tippet's residence, where he learned that Willie had gone home, so he followed him up, and soon found himself at Notting Hill before the door of Mrs Willders' humble abode. The door was opened by Willie himself, who stared in some surprise at the stately visitor.

"Is William Willders at 'ome?" said Hopkins.

"I rather think he is," replied Willie, with a grin; "who shall I say calls on him—eh? You'd better send up your card."

Hopkins frowned, but, being a good-natured man, he immediately smiled, and said he would walk in.

"I think," said Willie, interposing his small person in the way, "that you'd as well stop where you are, for there's a invalid in the drawing-room, and all the other rooms is engaged 'cept the kitchen, which of course I could not show *you* into. Couldn't you deliver your message? I could manage to carry it if it ain't too heavy."

In a state of uncertainty as to how far this was consistent with his dignity, Hopkins hesitated for a moment, but at length delivered his message, with which Willie returned to the parlour.

Here, on the little sofa, lay the tall form of Frank Willders, arrayed in an old dressing-gown, and with one of his legs bandaged up and motionless. His face was pale, and he was suffering great pain, but a free-and-easy smile was on his lips, for beside him sat a lady and a young girl, the latter of whom was afflicted with strong sympathy, but appeared afraid to show it. Mrs Willders, with a stocking and knitting-wires in her hands, sat on a chair at the head of the bed, looking anxious, but hopeful and mild. An open Bible which lay on a small table at her side, showed how she had been engaged before the visitors entered.

"My good sir," said the lady, with much earnestness of voice and manner, "I assure you it grieves me to the heart to see you lying in this state, and I'm quite sure it grieves Emma too, and all your friends. When I think of the risks you run and the way you dash up these dreadful fire—fire—things—what-d'ye-call-ums. What *do* you call them?"

"Fire-escapes, ma'am," answered Frank, with a smile.

"Ah, fire-escapes (how you ever come down them alive is a mystery to me, I'm sure!) But as I was saying, it makes one shudder to think of; and—and—how does your leg feel *now*?" said Miss Tippet, forgetting what she had intended to say.

"Pretty well," replied Frank; "the doctor tells me it has broken without splintering, and that I'll be all right in a few weeks, and fit for duty again."

"Fit for duty, young man!" exclaimed Miss Tippet; "do you mean to say that you will return to your dreadful profession when you recover? Have you not received warning enough?"

"Why, madam," said Frank, "some one must look after the fires, you know, else London would be in ashes in a few months; and I like the work."

"Like the work!" cried Miss Tippet, in amazement; "like to be almost smoked to death, and burned alive, and tumbled off roofs, and get upset off what's-its-names, and fall down fire—fire—things, and break all your legs and arms!"

"Well—no, I don't like all that," said Frank, laughing; "but I like the vigour and energy that are called forth in the work, and I like the object of the work, which is to save life and property. Why," exclaimed Frank enthusiastically, "it has all the danger and excitement of a soldier's life without the bloody work, and with better ends in view."

"Nay, nay, Frank," said the peaceful Mrs Willders, "you must not say 'better ends,' because it is a great and glorious thing to defend one's native land."

"A very just observation," said Miss Tippet, nodding approval.

"Why, mother, who would have expected to hear *you* standing up for the red-coats in this fashion?" said Frank.

"I stand up for the blue-jackets too," observed Mrs Willders meekly; "they fight for their country as well."

"True, mother," rejoined Frank; "but I did not refer to ultimate ends, I only thought of the immediate results in connection with those engaged. The warrior fights, and, in so doing, destroys life and property. The fireman fights, and in doing so protects and preserves both."

"Hear! hear!" interrupted Willie; "but the copy-book says 'Comparisons are *odiows*!' don't it? Mother, here's a fathom and two inches or so of humanity as wants me to go with him to Mr Auberly. I s'pose Frank can get along without me for a little while—eh?"

"Certainly, my son; why does he want you?"

"Don't know. P'raps he's goin' to offer to make me his secretary. But you don't seem at all alarmed at the prospect of my being carried off by a flunkey."

"You'll come back, dearie, I doubt not."

"Don't you? Oh, very well; then I'll just look after myself. If I don't return, I'll advertise myself in the *Times*. Good-bye."

Willie returned to the door and announced that he was ready to go.

"But where is William?" asked Hopkins.

"Mister William Willders stands before you," said the boy, placing his hand on his heart and making a bow. "Come now, Long-legs," he added, seizing Hopkins by the arm and pushing him downstairs and into the cab. Leaping in after him he shut the door with a bang. "Now then, cabby, all right, Beverly Square, full split; sixpence extra if you do it within the half!"

Away they went, and in a few seconds were in the Mall driving at a rattling pace.

"See that house?" asked Willie, so suddenly as to startle Hopkins, who was quite overwhelmed by the vigour and energy of his young companion.

"Eh! which! the one with the porch before the door?"

"No, no, stoopid! the old red-brick house with the limbs of a vine all over the front of it, and the skeleton of a Virginia creeper on the wall."

"Yes, I see it," said Hopkins, looking out.

"Ah, a friend o' mine lives there. I'm on wisitin' terms there, I am. Now then, mind your eye, pump-handle," cried Willie; "the turn's rather sharp—hallo!"

As they swung round into the Bayswater Road the cab came in contact with a butcher's cart, which, being the lighter vehicle, was

nearly upset. No serious damage resulted, however, and soon after they drew up at the door of the house next Mr Auberly's; for that gentleman still occupied the residence of his friend.

"Master Willders," said Hopkins, ushering him into the presence of Mr Auberly, who still sat at the head of the couch.

Willie nodded to Loo and then to her father.

"Boy," said the latter, beckoning Willie to approach, "my daughter wishes me to go and visit a poor family near London Bridge. She tells me you know their name and address."

"The fairy, you know," said Loo, explaining.

"Ah, the Cattleys," answered Willie.

"Yes," resumed Mr Auberly. "Will you conduct me to their abode?"

In some surprise Willie said that he would be happy to do so, and then asked Loo how she did.

While Mr Auberly was getting ready, Willie was permitted to converse with Loo and Mrs Rose, who was summoned to attend her young mistress. Presently Mr Auberly returned, bade Mrs Rose be very careful of the invalid, and then set off with Willie.

At first the boy felt somewhat awed by the remarkably upright figure that stalked in silence at his side, but as they continued to thread their way through the streets he ventured to attempt a little conversation.

"Weather's improvin', sir," said Willie, looking up. "It is," replied Mr Auberly, looking down in surprise at the boldness of his small guide.

"Good for the country, sir," observed Willie.

Mr Auberly, being utterly ignorant of rural matters, thought it best to say nothing to this.

We may add that Willie knew just as little (or as much), and had only ventured the remark because he had often heard it made in every possible variety of weather, and thought that it would be a safe observation, replete, for all he knew to the contrary, with hidden wisdom.

There was silence after this for some time.

"D'you know Mr Tippet well, sir?" inquired Willie suddenly.

"Ye—yes; oh yes, I know him *pretty* well."

"Ah, he's a first-rater," observed Willie, with a look of enthusiasm; "you've no notion what a trump he is. Did you hear ever of his noo machine for makin' artificial butter?"

"No," said Mr Auberly, somewhat impatiently.

"Ah, it's a wonderful invention, that is, sir."

"Boy," said Mr Auberly, "will you be so good as to walk behind me?"

"Oh, *cer'nly*, sir," said Willie, with a profound bow, as he fell to the rear.

They walked on in silence until they came to the vicinity of the Monument, when Mr Auberly turned round and asked Willie which way they were to go now.

"Right back again," said Willie.

"How, boy; what do you mean?"

"We've overshot the mark about half a mile, sir. But, please, I thought you must be wishin' to go somewhere else first, as you led the way."

"Lead the way, *now*, boy," said Mr Auberly, with a stern look.

Willie obeyed, and in a few minutes they were groping in the dark regions underground which Mr Cattley and his family inhabited. With some difficulty they found the door, and stood in the presence of "the fairy."

Thin though the fairy had been when Willie saw her last, she might have been called fat compared with the condition in which they now found her. She appeared like a mere shadow, with a delicate skin thrown over it. A bad transparency would have been more substantial in appearance. She lay alone on her lonely pallet with a farthing candle beside her, which cast a light sufficient only to make darkness visible. Being near the poor invalid, it caused her large dark eyes to glitter in an awful manner.

Willie at once forgot his companion, and running up to the fairy, seized her hand, and asked her how she did.

"Pretty well, Willie. It's kind of you to come and see me so often."

"Not a bit, Ziza; you know I like it; besides, I've only come to-day to show a gentleman the way."

He pointed to Mr Auberly, who had stopped short in the doorway, but who now advanced and sat down beside the invalid, and put to her several formal questions in a very stately and stiff manner, with a great assumption of patronage. But it was evident that he was not accustomed to the duty of visiting the sick, and, like little boys and girls when they sit down to write a letter, was very much at a loss what to say! He began by asking the fairy about her complaint, and exhausted every point that entered into his imagination in reference to that. Then he questioned her as to her circumstances; after which he told her that he had been sent to see her by his daughter Louisa, who was herself very ill, owing to the effects of a fire in his own house.

At this point the child became interested, and came to his relief by asking a great many eager and earnest questions about Loo. She knew about the fire in Beverly Square and its incidents, Willie having often related them to her during his visits; and she knew Mr Auberly by name, and was interested in him, but his frigid manner had repelled her, until he spoke of Loo having sent him to see her.

"Oh, I've been so sorry about Miss Loo, sir," said Ziza, raising her large eyes full in Mr Auberly's face; "I've heard of her, you know, from Willie, and when I've been lying all alone here for hours and hours together, I have wondered how she spent her time, and if there were kind people about her to keep up her spirits. It's so strange that she and I should have been both hurt by a fire, an' both of us so different every way. I *do* hope she'll get better, sir."

Mr Auberly became suddenly much interested in the fairy, for just as "love begets love," so does interest beget interest. His feelings having been roused, his tongue was loosed, and forthwith he enjoyed a delightful conversation with the intelligent child; not that there was any remarkable change as to the matter of what was spoken, but there was a vast change in the manner of speaking it.

Willie also chimed in now and then, and volunteered his opinions in a way that would have called forth a sharp rebuke from his patron half an hour before; but he was permitted to speak, even encouraged, now, for Mr Auberly was being tickled pleasantly; he was having his feelings and affections roused in a way that he had never thought of or tried before; he was gathering golden experiences that he had never stooped to touch before, although the mine had been under his feet all his life, and his path had been strewn with neglected nuggets from the cradle—fortunately not, as yet, to the grave! Ziza's Bible lay on the counterpane close to her wasted little hand. While she was talking of Loo, with deep sympathy beaming out of her eyes and trembling in her tones, Mr Auberly laid his hand inadvertently on it. She observed the action, and said—

"Are you going to read and pray with me, sir?"

Mr Auberly was taken very much aback indeed by this question.

"Well—no," said he, "that is—if—fact, I have not brought my prayer-book with me; but—but—I will read to you if you wish it."

Sympathy was gone now; the fairy felt that, and, not clearly understanding why, wondered at it. She thanked her visitor, however, and shut her eyes, while Mr Auberly opened the Bible and cleared his voice. His confusion was only momentary; still the idea that he could be confused at all by two mere children in such a

wretched cellar so nettled the worthy man, that he not only recovered his self-possession, but read a chapter with all the solemn dignity of tone and manner that he would have assumed had he been officiating in Saint Paul's or Westminster Abbey. This was such a successful essay, and overawed his little congregation so terribly, that for a moment he thought of concluding with the benediction; but, being uncertain whether he could go correctly through it, he wisely refrained.

Thereafter he rose, and bade the fairy good-night.

"Your father does not return till late, I suppose?" he said, while he held her hand.

"No; it is morning generally before he gets away. The pantomimes are hurting him, I fear, for he's not so active as he once was, and he says he feels the falls very bad."

"Poor man! It's very sad; but I suppose it's the usual way with that class of men. Well, goodnight again."

"Good-night, sir!" responded the fairy, with a bright smile, "and thank you very much for your visit. Good-night, Willie."

Willie said good-night in such a sulky tone, and followed Mr Auberly to the door with such a reckless swagger, that the fairy gazed after him in unutterable surprise. After shutting the door with a bang, he suddenly opened it again, and said in a loud voice—

"I say, I'll get my wages day arter to-morrow. I'll bring you a couple o' bobs then. It's all I can afford just now, for cigars are dear. If you're hard up for wittles in the meantime, just grin and bear it; you'll not die, you know, you'll only get thinner. I *have* heard that a bit o' boiled shoe-leather ain't a bad thing to keep one easy till relief comes."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr Auberly in the distance, and bustling back as lie spoke; "I quite forgot; how stupid of me! I was directed by my daughter to give you this."

He took a ten-pound note from his purse, and put it into the fairy's hand.

"This is from Louisa," he continued, "and I may add that it is the savings from her pocket-money. I did not wish the dear child to part with it, and said I would give it to you from myself; but she was so urgent, and seemed so distressed when I refused my consent, that I gave in; so you have to thank my daughter, not me."

Mr Auberly smiled and nodded as he turned to go, and there was really very little grimness in the smile on this occasion—very little indeed! Willie also nodded with great violence and frequency; he likewise winked with one eye, and otherwise sought to indicate that there were within him sundry deep and not easily expressed thoughts and feelings, which were, upon the whole, of a satisfactory nature.

As for the fairy, she never once smiled or thanked Mr Auberly, but simply stared at him with her lustrous eyes open to their very widest, and she continued to stare at the door, as though she saw him through it, for some time after they were gone. Then she turned suddenly to the wall, thanked God, and burst into tears—glad tears, such as only those can weep who have unexpectedly found relief when their extremity was greatest.

Chapter Twenty Four.

A Change in Fortune.

There is nothing more surprising in regard to sublunary matters than the way in which unexpected events arise out of what may be called unintentional causes.

When David Boone and his friend Gorman planned the insurance and destruction of the toy shop and its contents, they no more expected that the very first steps towards that end would result in the conversion of a poor into a flourishing business, than they expected that the expression of a wish would convert Poorthing Lane into Beverly Square; yet so it was.

Poor David was rendered so desperate by his straits, and so anxious to escape from the crime into which his friend sought to plunge him, that he meditated suicide; but, lacking the courage to accomplish this, he relieved his feelings by carrying out the details of his business and the preliminary steps of his plan, with the wild and reckless energy of a maniac. The more he thought of the meshes which Gorman had cast around him, the more did he regard escape impossible. He therefore sought relief in action. He not only talked to his neighbours (as per agreement) about his rapidly increasing business, but he made purchases on a scale more extensive than he had ever before contemplated, even in his dreams. Being convinced that ruin, sooner or later, was his doom, he indulged in the most extravagant excesses, with much of the feeling which prompts some seamen, when the ship is sinking, to break into the spirit room and spend the short remnant of life in jollity. He experienced a sort of savage delight in ordering right and left from wholesale dealers in town and country, and even went so far as to write to Germany for toys, using the name of a well-known London house which had hitherto (and justly) believed him to be an honest man. The result of this was that Poorthing Lane was besieged for some time by railway vans, and waggons so huge that apparently an inch more added to their bulk would have rendered their passage impossible. Great deal boxes were constantly being unpacked in front of Mr Boone's door, much to the annoyance of Miss Tippet, who could not imagine how it happened that her sedate and slow-going landlord had got such a sudden increase of business. Little did she think, poor lady, that this was the fuel with which it was intended to roast her alive!

Some of the smaller accounts for goods thus purchased Boone paid at once with the money furnished to him by Gorman, and thus got credit for being a capitalist. Others he deferred payment of until a more convenient season.

His friend Gorman, who would not have bent the joint of his little finger to have saved him from destruction, was so anxious to get up a good appearance, for the sake of getting the insurance effected advantageously, that he did his best to carry out his part of the plan, and, being a man of energy who in the paths of virtue might have risen to a high position among men, he succeeded beyond his expectation. Crowds of purchasers were sent by him to the shop of "the celebrated toy-man." Some were mere decoy-ducks, who came and went (for a consideration) pretty frequently, and only "priced" the goods. Others were genuine purchasers, and between the two they created so much traffic in the toy-shop, that the multitude—so difficult to move by mere suasion, but so prone to follow blindly in the wake of a senseless rush, when once the rush takes place—began to move in the direction of the toyshop, and shortly before Christmas the demand for toys was so great, that Boone had to engage two assistants to carry on the business, and even the lane itself began to feel the benefit of the sudden increase of traffic.

All this was patent to the eyes of David Boone, but he was so overwhelmed with a sense of the guilt he was about to incur, and the deception he was even then practising, that he regarded the whole affair as a hollow bubble, which would soon burst and leave nothing behind. Even the rapid increase of the credit-balance in his bank-book did not affect his opinion, for he was not much of a financier, and, knowing that his transactions were founded on deception, he looked on the balance as being deceptive also.

Not so thought Gorman. That wily individual perceived, to his amazement, that things were taking a turn which had never been contemplated, so he silently looked on and wondered, and chuckled and resolved to abide his time.

As prosperity flowed in upon him, David Boone became more insane—for his condition of mind was little, if at all, short of temporary insanity—and his proceedings became more eccentric than ever. Among other things, he became suddenly smitten with a desire to advertise, and immediately in the columns of the tapers appeared advertisements to the effect that "The Celebrated Toy

Emporium" was to be found in Poorthing Lane. Finding that this increased his business considerably, he hit upon a plan of advertising which has been practised rather extensively of late years in London. He sent out an army of boys with pots of whitewash and brushes, with directions to print in rough but large legible letters the words, "Who's Boone?" on all the blank walls of the metropolis, and in the papers he answered the question by having printed under the same title, "Why, the manager of the Toy Emporium, to be sure, in Poorthing Lane." He also advertised specially that he had in stock, "an assortment of 500 golden-haired dolls from Germany, full-dressed, half-dressed, and naked."

This last was irresistible. Thousands of young hearts beat high at the mere thought of such numbers—"with *golden* hair too!" and dozens of mammas, and papas too, visited Poorthing Lane in consequence.

In course of time David Boone's eyes began to open to the fact that he was rapidly making a fortune.

It was after the bustle of the Christmas season was over that he made this discovery. One of his new assistants, a young man named Lyall, was the means of opening his employer's eyes to the truth. Lyall was a clever accountant, and had been much surprised from the first that Boone kept no regular system of books. At the end of the year he suggested that it would be well to take stock and find out the state of the business. Boone agreed. Lyall went to work, and in a short time the result of his labours showed, that after all debts were paid, there would remain a satisfactory credit-balance at the bank.

On the evening of the day on which this marvellous fact was impressed on Boone's mind, Gorman called, and found his friend rubbing his hands, and smiling benignantly in the back room.

"You seem jolly," said Gorman, sitting down, as usual, by the fire, and pulling out, as usual, the short pipe. "Business gittin' on well?"

"It is," said Boone, standing with his back to the fire, and swaying himself gently to and fro; "things don't look so bad. I can pay you the arrears of rent now."

"Oh, can you?" said Gorman. "Ah!"

"Yes, and I'm in a position to pay you fifty pounds of the debt I owe you besides," said Boone.

"And a bill at three months for the balance?" inquired Gorman.

No, he could not venture to do that exactly, but he hoped to pay a further instalment before the end of three months.

"Humph! How much may the profits be?"

Boone could not say precisely, not having had all his accounts squared, but he believed they were considerable.

"I'll be bound they are," said Gorman with a growl; "you won't want to set things alight now, I daresay."

"Well, I think it'll be as well to wait a bit, and let us make hay while this sunshine goes on."

"Let *you* make hay, you mean?"

"Oh, as to that, the most of it will go to your stack for some time to come, Gorman."

"H'm! and what about the insurance?"

"Well, you know," observed Boone, "it's of no use paying the premium for nothing. As we don't mean to set the place alight, you know."

"Ay, but the life insurance, I mean," said Gorman.

Boone laughed, and observed that he thought it best not to die just at that particular time, whereupon Gorman laughed, too, and said he was about right, and that it would be as well to delay both events in the meantime; after saying which, he took his leave in better humour than usual, for Gorman was what men of his own stamp termed a "deep file." He saw into futurity—so he thought—a considerable way farther than most men, and in the future of his own imagination he saw such a pleasant picture that his amiable spirit was quite cheered by it. He saw David Boone making money so fast, that his

goods might be insured at a much larger amount; he saw him getting into fresh difficulties, of course, because such a business, on such a foundation, could not go on prosperously except under the most able management, and, even though it did prosper in spite of improbabilities, he foresaw that there was an amiable gentleman, much like himself, who would induce Boone to traffic beyond his means, and when money was wanted, the same kind gentleman (he saw that quite clearly) would come forward generously with a loan, for which he would only ask Boone to make over to him in security his two policies of insurance—fire and life; after which—well, we need not go on revealing the future as it appeared to Gorman's mental vision; suffice it to say, that he saw upon the whole a prospect which gave him great satisfaction.

There were one or two things which he did not see, however, and which might have modified his feelings considerably if he had seen them. Of these we shall say nothing at present.

As for David Boone; his heart rejoiced, for he, too, had visions of the future which charmed him. He saw his debt to Gorman paid, and himself set free from the power of that amiable friend. He saw a toyshop change its locality and its aspect. He saw it transplanted into Regent Street, with plate-glass windows, in which were displayed objects of marvellous ingenuity and transcendent beauty. One window especially exhibiting, not a crowd, but, a very nation of wax-dolls with blue eyes and golden hair! He saw, moreover, a very little old woman, lying in a bed, in an elegant and comfortable apartment, with a Bible beside her, and a contented smile on her face. This old lady resembled his own mother so strongly, that all other prospects of the future faded from his view, and in the fulness of his heart and his success, he resolved then and there to go home and present her with a gift on the strength of the prosperity at that time attained to.

David was sorely perplexed as to what this gift ought to be. He thought of a new silk gown at first; but the remembrance of the fact that his mother was bedridden banished this idea. Owing to the same fact, new boots and gloves were inadmissible; but caps were not—happy thought! He started off at once, and returned home with a cap so gay, voluminous, and imposing, that the old lady, unused though she was to mirth, laughed with amusement, while she cried with joy, at this (not the first) evidence of her son's affection.

Chapter Twenty Five.

Changes and Mysteries.

Seven years passed away. During that period London revolved in its usual course, reproducing its annual number of events—its births, deaths, and marriages; its plans, plots, and pleasures; its business, bustle, and bungle; its successes, sentiments, and sensations; its facts, fancies, and failures—also its fires; which last had increased steadily, until they reached the imposing number of about twelve hundred in the year.

But although that time elapsed, and many changes took place, for better or for worse, in all circles of society, there had not been much change in the relative positions of the actors in our tale; at least, not much that was apparent. Great alterations, however, had taken place in the physical condition of some of them, as the sequel will show.

One bright morning in the spring-time of the year, a youth with the soft down of early manhood on his lips and cheeks, paced slowly to and fro near the margin of the pond in Kensington Gardens.

Being early, the spot was as complete a solitude as the backwoods of North America, and so thick was the foliage on the noble trees, that no glimpse of the surrounding city could be obtained in any direction. Everything that greeted eye and ear was characteristic of "the woods," even to the swans, geese, ducks, and other water-fowl which sported on the clear surface of the pond; while the noise of traffic in the mighty metropolis was so subdued by distance as to resemble the deep-toned roar of a great cataract. A stranger, rambling there for the first time would have found it difficult to believe that he was surrounded on all sides by London!

It was one of those soul-stirring mornings in which Nature seems to smile. There was just enough of motion in the air to relieve the effect of what is called a dead calm. The ripple on the water caught the sun's rays, and, breaking them up, scattered them about in a shower of fragmentary diamonds. Fleecy-white clouds floated in the blue sky, suggesting dreams of fairy-land, and scents of sprouting herbage filled the nostrils, reminding one of the fast-approaching summer.

The youth who sauntered alone by the margin of the pond was broad of shoulder and stout of limb, though not unusually tall—not much above the middle height. His gait was easy, free—almost reckless—as though he cared not a fig for anybody, high or low, rich or poor; yet his eye was bright and his smile kindly, as though he cared for everybody—high, low, rich, and poor. He sauntered with his hands in the pockets of his short coat, and whistled an operatic air in a low melodious tone. He was evidently waiting for someone; and, judging from his impatient gestures, someone who was resolved to keep him waiting.

Presently, a female figure appeared in the far distance, on the broad avenue that leads direct from the Serpentine. She was young and graceful in form; but she walked with a quick step, with her eyes looking down, like one who regarded neither youth nor grace. Curiously enough, this downcast look gave to her fair face a modest, captivating grace, which is never seen to sit upon the lofty brow, or to circle round the elevated nose, of conscious beauty.

The youth at first paid no attention to her (she was not the "someone" for whom he waited); but as she drew near, he became suddenly interested, and threw himself in her way. Just as she was about to pass, she raised her eyes, started, blushed, and exclaimed:

"Mr Willders!"

"Good morning, Miss Ward!" said the youth, advancing with a smile, and holding out his hand; "this is indeed an unexpected pleasure; I did not know that you were addicted to early walking."

"I am indeed fond of early walking," replied Emma, with a smile; "but I cannot say that it is so much pleasure as duty which brings me here. I am a day-governess, and pass this pond every morning on my way to Kensington, where the family in which I teach resides."

"Indeed," said Willie, with that amount of emphasis which denotes moderate surprise and solicits information.

He paused for a single moment; but, seeing that Emma did not intend to speak of her own affairs, he added quickly:

"I am waiting for my brother Frank. We arranged to meet here this morning. I hope that Miss Tippet is well?"

"Quite well," replied Emma, with a blush, as she took a sudden interest in a large duck, which swam up to the edge of the pond at that moment, in the hope, no doubt, of obtaining food from her hand. Its hopes were disappointed, however, for Emma only called it a beautiful creature; and then, turning somewhat abruptly to Willie, said, with a slight look of embarrassment, that she feared she should be late and must bid him good-morning.

Willie felt a good deal puzzled, and had he been the same Willie that we introduced at the commencement of our tale, he would have told Emma his mind candidly, and asked her what was the matter; but Willie was a man now, so he smiled, lifted his hat politely, and wished her good-morning.

Five minutes later, Frank appeared in the distance and hurried forward. Seven years had added a little to the breadth of his shoulders, and the firm self-possession of his step and look; but they had made no other perceptible impression on him. There was, indeed, a deep scar on his right temple; but that was the result of accident, not of time. Many a hairbreadth escape had he made during these seven years of fighting with the flames, and often had his life been in imminent danger; but he was fortunate in having escaped, hitherto, with only a broken leg and a variety of small cuts, scalds, and bruises. The cut on his temple was the severest, and most recent of these. He had got it in a fall through a second floor, which gave way under him as he was attempting to rescue an old bedridden man, who lay in an inner chamber. Frank was carried out in a state of insensibility on the broad shoulders of his friend Baxmore, while Dale rescued the old man.

"How goes it, Frank?" cried Willie, advancing and giving his brother's hand a warm shake; "the cut head mending—eh?"

"Oh, it's all right," replied Frank, with a smile, as they sauntered up and down by the margin of the pond; "the headaches have left me now, I'm thankful to say, and the–doctor tells me it won't leave much of a mark."

"You don't need to care much if it does, for it's an honourable scar, and does not spoil your beauty, old boy."

"Well, Willie," said Frank, "here I am at your request. What have you got to tell me; nothing serious, I hope?"

The stalwart fireman looked earnestly into his brother's face, and exhibited more anxiety than there seemed to be any occasion for.

"No, nothing very serious. It may be serious enough for all I know; but as far as my knowledge goes it's not bad enough to make you look so anxious. Why, what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing, Willie. Perhaps my late accident has shaken my nerves a bit."

Willie burst into a loud laugh, and said that it was so awfully absurd to hear a man like Frank talking of nerves at all that he could not help it.

"Well, but what *is* the news you've got to tell me?" resumed Frank. "You're not going to be married, are you?"

Frank asked this with a look and expression so peculiar that Willie again laughed and said that really he could not understand him at all; for even suppose he had been going to be married, that was no reason why he should take it so much to heart, as the expression on his face implied he did.

"Perhaps not, Willie," said Frank with a quiet smile; "but *that* is not what you want to speak about, then?"

"No, certainly not."

Frank appeared relieved, and Willie, observing the appearance, said—

"Come, now, I really don't see why you should be so very much pleased to hear that. I'm young, it is true, but I'm old enough, and I have a good business, with brilliant prospects, and there appears to me no reason on earth why I should not marry if I felt so disposed."

"None in the world, Willie," said Frank, with some haste, "but you tell me you are not thinking of that just now; so pray let's hear what you've got to say."

"Oh! it's all very well in you, old Blazes, to change the subject in that way, but I'm nettled at your implied objection to my getting married if I choose. However, we won't quarrel over it, so here goes for the point."

Willie's bantering manner instantly left him. He walked in silence for a few seconds, as if he pondered what he had to say.

"There are two points which trouble me just now, Frank, and I want your opinion in regard to them. The first is, Miss Tippet. She is a small point, no doubt, whether we regard her physically or mentally, but she is by no means a small point if we regard her socially, for the good that that little woman does in a quiet, unobtrusive way is almost incredible. D'ye know, Frank, I have a sort of triumphant feeling in regard to the sour, cynical folk of this world—whom it is so impossible to answer in their fallacious and sophistical arguments—when I reflect that there is a day coming when the meek and lowly and unknown workers for the sake of our Lord shall be singled out from the multitude, and their true place and position assigned them. Miss Tippet will stand higher, I believe, in the next world than she does in this. Well, Miss Tippet has been much out of sorts of late, mentally; and Mr Tippet, who is the kindest man alive, has been very anxious about her, and has begged of me to try to counsel and comfort her. Now, it is not an easy matter to comply with this request, because, in the first place, Miss Tippet does not want me to counsel or comfort her, so far as I know; and, in the second place, my motives for attempting to do so might be misunderstood."

"How so?" exclaimed Frank quickly.

"Well, you know, Miss Ward lives with her," said Willie, with a modest look.

There was again something peculiar about Frank's expression and manner, as he said, "Well, it would not signify much, I daresay, if people were to make remarks about you and Miss Ward, for you know it would not be misconstruction after all."

"What mean you?" asked Willie in surprise.

"You remember what you once said to me about your bosom being on fire," pursued Frank. "I suppose the fire has not been got under yet, has it?"

Willie burst into a loud laugh.

"Why, Blazes, do you not know—? But, no matter; we came here to talk of business; after that is done we can diverge to love."

Willie paused here again for a few seconds and then resumed:

"You must know, Frank, that the cause of Miss Tippet's disturbance just now is the strange conduct of her landlord, David Boone, who has been going on of late in a way that would justify his friends putting him in an asylum. His business affairs are, I fear, in a bad way, and he not only comes with excessive punctuality for Miss Tippet's rent, but he asks her for loans of money in a wild incoherent fashion, and favours her with cautions and warnings of a kind that are utterly incomprehensible. Only the other night he came to her and asked if she did not intend soon to visit some of her friends; and on being informed that she did not, he went further and advised her to do so, saying that she was looking very ill, and he feared she would certainly get into bad health if she did not. In fact, he even said that he feared she would die if she did not go to the country for a few weeks. Now, all this would be laughable, as being the eccentricity of a half-cracked fellow, if it were not that he exhibits such a desperate anxiety that his advice should be followed, and even begged of the poor lady, with tears in his eyes, to go to visit her friends. What d'ye think of it, Frank? I confess myself utterly nonplussed."

"I don't know what to think," said Frank after a pause. "Either the man must be mad, or he wishes to rob Miss Tippet's house in her absence."

Willie admitted that the first supposition might be true, but he held stoutly that the second was impossible, for Boone was too honest for that. They conversed for some time on this point, and both came ultimately to the conclusion that the thing was incomprehensible and mysterious, and that it ought to be watched and inquired into.

Willie, moreover, said he would go and consult his friend Barret about it.

"You know Barret, Frank?"

"No; but I have heard of him."

"Ah, he's a first-rate fellow—in one of the insurance offices—I forget which. I came to know him when I first went to Mr Tippet's. He lived then in the floor below us with a drunken companion whom he was anxious to reclaim; but he found him so hard to manage that he at last left him, and went to live in Hampstead. He and I became great friends when he lived under our workshop. He got married two years ago, and I have not seen much of him since, but he's a sharp fellow, and knows a good deal more of the Tippets than I was aware of. I'll go and see if he can throw any light on this subject."

"The next point," pursued Willie, "is Cattley the clown. Have you seen or heard of him lately?"

Frank said he had not.

"Well, I am greatly troubled about him. He has become a regular drunkard, and leads his poor daughter a terrible life. He is so broken down with dissipation that he can scarcely procure employment anywhere. His son is fortunately a pretty decent fellow, though somewhat wild, and helps in a small way to support his father, having obtained a situation as clown at one of the minor theatres. The daughter, Ziza, has long ago given up the profession, and has been struggling to maintain herself and her father by painting fire-screens, and making artificial flowers; but the work is severe and ill paid, and I see quite well that if the poor girl is not relieved in some way she will not be able to bear up."

"I grieve to hear this, Willie," said Frank, "but how comes it that you take so great an interest in these people?"

"Frank," said Willie, assuming a tone of deep seriousness, while a glow suffused his cheeks, "can you keep a secret?"

"I think so, lad; at least I promise to try."

"Well, then," said Willie, "I love Ziza Cattley. I knew her first as a fairy, I know her now as a woman who is worthy of a place among the angels, for none but those who know her well and have seen her fighting the battle of life can have the least idea of the self-denial, the perseverance under difficulties, the sweetness of temper, and the deep-seated love of that devoted girl. She goes every night, after the toil of each day, to the door of the theatre, where she waits to conduct her father safely past the gin-palaces, into which, but for her, he would infallibly stray, and she spends all she has in making him comfortable, but I see well enough that this is killing her. She can't stand it long, and I won't stand it at all! I've made up my mind to that. Now, Frank, I want your advice."

To say that Frank was hearty in his assurances that he would do what he could to help his brother, would be a faint way of stating the truth. Frank shook Willie by the hand and congratulated him on having gained the affections of one whom he knew to be a good girl, and then condoled with him on that girl's unfortunate circumstances; but Willie stopped him short at this point by asking him in a tone of surprise what could be the matter with him, for at first he had been apparently annoyed at the notion of his (Willie's) being in love, and now he seemed quite pleased about it. In short, his conduct was unaccountable!

Frank laughed, but said eagerly—

"Why. Willie, did you not tell me long ago that there was a fire in your bosom, lit up by a certain young friend of Miss Tippet's—"

"Oh," interrupted Willie, "Emma Ward; ah, yes, I confess that I did feel spooney once in that direction when I was a boy, but the fairy displaced her long ago. No, no, Frank, I'm not accountable for boyish fancies. By the way, I have just parted from the fair Emma. We had a *tête-à-tête* here not half an hour before you arrived."

"Here!" exclaimed Frank in surprise.

"Ay, here," repeated Willie; "she passes this pond every morning, she told me, on her way to teach a family in Kensington; by the way, I didn't think of asking whether the father, mother, and servants were included among her pupils. Why, Frank, what an absent frame

of mind you are in this morning! I declare it is not worth a man's while consulting you about anything."

"I beg pardon," cried Frank quickly, "your words caused my mind to wander a bit. Come, what do you think of doing?"

"What do you think I should do? that is the question."

"You can offer to assist them," suggested Frank. "I've done so," said the other, "but Ziza won't accept of assistance."

"Could we not manage to get her a situation of some sort with light work and good pay?"

"Ah! a fireman's, for instance," cried Willie, with a sarcastic laugh; "did you ever hear of a situation with light work and good pay except under Government? *I* never did; but we might perhaps find *steady* work and good pay. It would only be required for a time, because I mean to—ah, well, no matter—but how and where is it to be got? Good Mr Tippet is of no use, because he is mad."

"Mad, Willie!"

"Ay, mad as a March hare. For years back I have suspected it, but now, I am sure of it; in fact I feel that I have gradually come to be his keeper—but more of that anon. Meanwhile, what is to be done for the Cattleys?"

"Could nothing be done with Mr Auberly?"

Willie shook his head.

"No, I fear not. He was in a soft state once—long ago—six or seven years now, I think—when the dear fairy was ill and he seemed as if he were going to become a man; but his daughter Loo had just begun to be ill at that time. She's been so long ill now that he has got used to it, and has relapsed again into an oyster."

"He might be reached through Loo yet," said Frank.

"Perhaps," replied Willie, "but I doubt it, for he's a blunt old fellow in his feelings, however sharp he may be in his business; besides, Loo is so weak now that very few are allowed to see her except Ziza, and Miss Tippet, and Emma Ward."

The brothers remained silent after this for some time, for neither of them could see his way out of their difficulties; at last Frank suggested that Willie should go home and consult his mother.

"She is wise, Willie, and has never given us bad advice yet."

"I know what her first advice will be," said Willie.

"What?" asked Frank.

"To go and pray about it," answered Willie.

"Well, she might give worse advice than that," said Frank, with much earnestness. "In fact, I doubt if she could give better."

"True," assented Willie, "and now, old fellow, I'm off. Mr Tippet likes punctuality. I'll look in at the station in passing if anything turns up to clear my mind on these matters; meanwhile good-bye."

It is a remarkable fact that Frank Willders took an early walk, as frequently as possible, in Kensington Gardens, near the pond, after this conversation with his brother, and it is a still more remarkable fact, that he always felt like a guilty man on these occasions, as if he were taking some mean advantage of some one; yet it was certain that he took advantage of no one, for nobody ever met him there by any chance whatever! A fact even more remarkable still was, that never, after that day, did Emma Ward go to her duties through Kensington Gardens, but always by the Bayswater Road, although the latter was dusty and unpicturesque compared with the former; and it is a circumstance worthy of note, as savouring a little of mystery, that Emma acted as if she too were a guilty creature during her morning walks, and glanced uneasily from side to side as she went along, expecting, apparently, that a policeman or a detective would pounce upon her suddenly and bear her off to prison. But, whether guilty or not guilty, it is plain that no policeman or detective had the heart to do it, for Miss Ward went on her mission daily without molestation.

It is not easy to say what was the cause of these unaccountable proceedings. We might hazard an opinion, but we feel that our duty is accomplished when we have simply recorded them. Perhaps love had something to do with them—perhaps not—who knows?

Chapter Twenty Six.

What Drink will do.

Time passed on, as time is wont to do, and Christmas came again. The snow was deep in London streets and thick on the roofs and chimneys. It curled over the eaves of the houses in heavy white folds ready to fall and smother the unwary passengers. It capped the railings everywhere with little white knobs, and rounded off the corners of things so, that wherever the eye alighted, the same impressions were invariably conveyed to it, namely, whiteness and rotundity. Corinthian capitals were rendered, if possible, more ornate than ever by snow; equestrian statues were laden with it so heavily, that the horses appeared to stagger beneath their trappings and the riders, having white tips to their noses, white lumps on their heads and shoulders, and white patches on their cheek-bones and chins, looked ineffably ridiculous, and miserably cold. Everything, in fact, was covered and blocked up with snow, and Londoners felt as if they had muffled drums in their ears.

It was morning. The sky was clear, the air still, and the smoke of chimneys perpendicular. Poulterers' shops were in their holiday attire; toy-shops were in the ascendant, and all other shops were gayer than usual. So were the people who thronged the streets and beat their hands and stamped their feet—for it was unusually cold.

Street boys were particularly lively, and chaff was flying as thickly as snow-flakes had fallen the night before. Even the roughs—who forsook their dens, and, with shovels and brooms on their shoulders, paraded the streets, intent on clearing door-steps with or without the leave of inhabitants—seemed to be less gruff than usual, and some of them even went the length of cutting jokes with the cabmen and the boys. Perhaps their spirits were elevated by the proud consciousness of being for once in the way of earning an honest penny!

"I say, Ned," observed one of these roughs (a lively one), who was very rough indeed, to a companion, who was rougher still and gloomy, "look at that there gal cleanin' of her steps with a fire-shovel! Ain't that economy gone mad? Hallo, young 'ooman, what's the use o' trying to do it with a teaspoon, when there's Ned and me ready to do it with our shovels for next to nothin'?"

The servant-girl declined the assistance thus liberally offered, so the two men moved slowly on, looking from side to side as they went, in expectation of employment, while a small boy, in a man's hat, who walked behind them, nodded to the girl, and said she was a "sensible thrifty gal," and that she might be sure there was "some feller unknown who would bless the day he was born after he'd got her."

Fifty yards farther on, a stout, red-faced, elderly gentleman was observed to look out at the street door and frown at things in general.

"Have your door-steps cleaned, sir?" asked the lively rough, taking the shovel off his shoulder.

The elderly gentleman being angry, on private and unknown grounds (perhaps bad digestion), vouchsafed no reply, but looked up at the sky and then over the way.

"Do it cheap, sir," said the lively rough.

"No!" said the elderly gentleman, with a sort of snapping look, as he turned his gaze up the street and then down it.

"Snow's wery deep on the steps, sir," said the rough.

"D'you suppose I'm an ass?" exclaimed the elderly gentleman, in a sudden burst.

"Well, sir," said the lively rough, in the grave tone and manner of one who has had a difficult question in philosophy put to him, "well, sir, I don't know about that."

His large mouth expanded gradually from ear to ear after this reply. The elderly gentleman's face became scarlet and his nose purple, and retreating two paces, he slammed the door violently in the rough's face.

"Ah, it all comes of over-feedin', poor feller," said the lively man, shouldering his shovel and resuming his walk beside his gloomy comrade, who neither smiled nor frowned at these pleasantries.

"A warm old g'n'l'm'n!" remarked the boy in the man's hat as he passed.

The lively man nodded and winked.

"Might eat his wittles raw an' cook 'em inside a'most!" continued the boy; "would advise him to keep out of 'yde Park, though, for fear he'd git too near the powder-magazine!"

At this point the gloomy rough—who did not appear, however, to be a genuine rough, but a pretty good imitation of one, made of material that had once seen better days—stopped, and said to his comrade that he was tired of that sort of work, and would bid him good-day. Without waiting for an answer he walked away, and his companion, without vouchsafing a reply, looked after him with a sneer.

"A rum cove!" he remarked to the small boy in the man's hat, as he continued his progress.

"Raythe r," replied the boy.

With this interchange of sentiment these casual acquaintances parted, to meet probably no more!

Meanwhile the gloomy rough, whom the lively one had called Ned, walked with rapid steps along several streets, as though he had a distinct purpose in view. He turned at last into a narrow, quiet street, and going up to the door of a shabby-genteel house, applied the knocker with considerable vigour.

"Now then, go along with you; we don't want *your* services here; we clear off our own snow, we do. Imprence! to knock, too, as if he was a gentleman!"

This was uttered by a servant-girl who had thrust her head out of a second-floor window to take an observation of the visitor before going down to open the door.

"Is he at home, Betsy dear?" inquired the gloomy man, looking up with a leer which proved that he could be the reverse of gloomy when he chose.

"Oh, it's you, is it? I don't think he wants to see you; indeed, I'm sure of it," said the girl.

"Yes he does, dear; at all events I want to see him; and, Betsy, say it's pressing business, and *not* beggin'."

Betsy disappeared, and soon after, reappearing at the door, admitted the man, whom she ushered into a small apartment, which was redolent of tobacco, and in which sat a young man slippered and dressing-gowned, taking breakfast.

"How are you, doctor?" said the visitor, in a tone that did not accord with his soiled and ragged garments, as he laid down his hat and shovel, and flung himself into a chair.

"None the better for seeing you, Hooper," replied the doctor sternly.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Ned, "what a world we live in, to be sure! It was 'Hail fellow! well met,' when I was well off; now," (he scowled here) "my old familiars give me the cold shoulder *because I'm poor.*"

"You know that you are unjust," said the doctor, leaning back in his chair, and speaking less sternly though not less firmly; "you know, Ned, that I have helped you with advice and with money to the utmost extent of my means, and you know that it was a long, long time before I ceased to call you one of my friends; but I do not choose to be annoyed by a man who has deliberately cast himself to the dogs, whose companions are the lowest wretches in London, and whose appearance is dirty and disgusting as well as disreputable."

"I can't help it," pleaded Hooper; "I can get no work."

"I don't wonder at that," replied the doctor; every friend you ever had has got you work of one kind or another during the last few years, and you have drunk yourself out of it every time. Do you imagine that your friends will continue to care for a man who cares not for himself?

Ned did not reply, but hung his head in moody silence.

"Now," continued the doctor, "my time is a little more valuable than yours; state what you have got to say, and then be off. Stay," he added, in a softened tone, "have you breakfasted?"

"No," answered Ned, with a hungry glance at the table.

"Well, then, as you did not come to beg, you may draw in your chair and go to work."

Ned at once availed himself of this permission, and his spirits revived wonderfully as he progressed with the meal, during which he stated the cause of his visit.

"The fact is," said he, "that I want your assistance, doctor—"

"I told you already," interrupted the other, "that I have assisted you to the utmost extent of my means."

"My good fellow, not so sharp, pray," said Ned, helping himself to another roll, the first having vanished like a morning cloud; "I don't want money—ah: that is to say, I *do* want money, but I don't want yours. No; I came here to ask you to help me to get a body."

"A body. What do you mean?"

"Why, what I say; surely you've cut up enough of 'em to know 'em by name; a dead body, doctor,—a subject."

The doctor smiled.

"That's a strange request, Ned. You're not going to turn to my profession as a last resort, I hope?"

"No, not exactly; but a friend of mine wants a body—that's all, and offers to pay me a good round sum if I get one for him."

"Is your friend a medical man?" asked the doctor.

"N-no, he's not. In fact, he has more to do with spirits than bodies; but he wants one of the latter—and I said I'd try to get him one—so, if you can help me, do so, like a good fellow. My friend is particular,

however; he wants a *man* one, above six feet, thin and sallow, and with long black hair."

"You don't suppose I keep a stock of assorted subjects on hand, do you?" said the doctor. "I fear it won't be easy to get what you want. Do you know what your friend intends to do with it?"

"Not I, and I don't care," said Ned, pouring out another cup of coffee. "What does a body cost?"

"Between two and three pounds," replied the doctor.

"Dear me, so cheap," said Ned, with a look of surprise; "then that knocks on the head a little plan I had. I thought of offering myself for sale at Guy's or one of the hospitals, and drinking myself to death with the money, leaving my address, so that they might know where to find me; but it's not worth while to do it for so little; in fact, I don't believe I could accomplish it on three pounds' worth of dissipation."

"Don't jest about your besetting sin," said the doctor gravely; "it's bad enough without that."

"Bad enough," exclaimed Ned, with a sudden flash of ferocity; "ay, bad enough in all conscience, and the worst of it is, that it makes me ready to jest about *anything*—in heaven, earth, or hell. Oh, drink! accursed drink!"

He started up and clutched the hair of his head with both hands for a moment; but the feeling passed away, and he sat down again and resumed breakfast, while he said in a graver tone than he had yet used—

"Excuse me, doctor; I'm subject to these bursts now and then. Well, what say you about the body? My friend offers me twenty pounds, if I get the right kind. That would be seventeen pounds of profit on the transaction. It's worth an effort. It might put me in the way of making one more stand."

Ned said this sadly, for he had made so many stands in time past, and failed to retain his position, that hope was at dead low-water of a very neap-tide now.

"I don't like the look of the thing," said the doctor. "There's too much secrecy about it for me. Why don't your friend speak out like a man; state what he wants it for, and get it in the regular way?"

"It mayn't be a secret, for all I know," said Ned Hooper, as he concluded his repast. "I did not take the trouble to ask him; because I didn't care. You might help me in this, doctor."

"Well, I'll put you in the way of getting what you want," said the doctor, after a few moments reflection; "but you must manage it yourself. I'll not act personally in such an affair; and let me advise you to make sure that you are not getting into a scrape before you take any steps in the matter. Meanwhile, I must wish you good-day. Call here again to-night, at six."

The doctor rose as he spoke, and accompanied Ned to the door. He left a coin of some sort in his palm, when he shook hands.

"Thankee," said Ned.

"If you had come to beg, you should not have got it," said the doctor. "God help him!" he added as he shut the door; "it is an awful sight to see an old companion fall so low."

Chapter Twenty Seven.

An Old Plot.

It is evening now. The snow is still on the ground; but it looks ruddy and warm in the streets, because of the blaze of light from the shop-windows, and it looks colder than it did on the house-tops, by reason of the moon which sails in the wintry sky.

The man in the moon must have been in good spirits that night, for his residence seemed almost fuller than the usual full moon, and decidedly brighter—to many, at least, of the inhabitants of London. It looked particularly bright to Miss Tippet, as she gazed at it through the windows of her upper rooms, and awaited the arrival of "a few friends" to tea. Miss Tippet's heart was animated with feelings of love to God and man; and she had that day, in obedience to the Divine precept, attempted and accomplished a good many little things, all of which were, either directly or indirectly, calculated to make human beings happy.

Emma Ward, too, thought the moon particularly bright that night; in fact she might almost have been regarded as a lunatic; so steadily did she gaze at the moon, and smile to herself without any apparent motive. There was reason for her joy, however, for she had come to know, in some mysterious way, that Frank Willders loved her; and she had known, for a long time past, that she loved Frank Willders.

Frank had become a foreman of the Fire Brigade, and had been removed from his former station and comrades to his new charge in the city. But Frank had not only risen in his profession; he had also risen intellectually. His mother had secured to him a pretty good education to begin with, and his own natural taste and studious habits had led him to read extensively. His business required him to sit up and watch when other men slept. He seldom went to bed before four o'clock any morning, and when he did take his rest he lay down like the soldier in an enemy's country, ready to rush to arms at the first sound of the bugle. His bugle, by the way, was a speaking-trumpet, one end of which was close to the head of his bed, the other end being in the lobby where the men on duty for the night reposed.

During these long watches in the silent lobby, with the two men belted and booted on their tressels, the clock ticking gently by his side, like the soft quiet voice of a chatty but not tiresome friend, Frank read book after book with absorbing interest. History, poetry, travel, romance—all kinds were equally devoured. At the particular time of which we write, however, he read more of poetry than of anything else.

The consequence was that Frank, who was one of nature's gentlemen, became a well-informed man, and might have moved in any circle of society with credit to himself, and profit as well as pleasure to others.

Frank was by nature grave, sedate, earnest, thoughtful. Emma was equally earnest—more so perhaps—but she was light-hearted (not light *headed*, observe) and volatile. The result was mutual attraction. Let philosophers account for the mutual attraction of these qualities as they best may, we simply record the fact. History records it; nature records it; experience—everything records it; who has the temerity, or folly, to deny it?

Emma and Frank *felt* it, and, in some mysterious way, Frank had come to know something or other about Emma's feelings, which it is not our business to inquire into too particularly.

So, then, Frank also gazed—no, not at the moon; it would have required him to ascend three flights of stairs, and a ladder, besides passing through a trap to the roof of the station, to enable him to do that; but there was a lamp over the fireplace, with a tin reflector, which had quite a dazzling effect of its own—not a bad imitation of the moon in a small way—so he gazed at that, and thought it very bright indeed; brighter than usual.

We may as well put the reader out of suspense at once by saying that we do not intend to describe Miss Tippet's evening with "a few friends." Our own private opinion in regard to the matter is, that if they had been fewer than they were, and more worthy of the name of friends, the evening might have been worth recording, but it is sufficient to say that they all came; acted as usual, spoke as usual, felt as usual, "favoured the company" with songs, as usual, and—ah—yes—enjoyed themselves as usual till about half-past eleven o'clock, when they all took their leave, with the exception of Miss Deemas,

who, in consideration of the coldness of the weather, had agreed to spend the night with her "dear friend."

Miss Deemas was one of those unfortunates with whom it is impossible for any one to sleep. Besides being angular and hard, she had a habit of kicking in her slumbers, and, being powerful, was a dangerous bedfellow. She knew this herself, and therefore wisely preferred, when visiting her friends, to sleep alone. Hence it happened that Miss Tippet and Emma went to bed in the back room with the green hangings, while Miss Deemas retired to the front room with the blue paper.

There is a common fallacy in naval matters founded on poetical license, to the effect that the mariner is separated from death by a single plank; whereas, the unpoetical truth is, that the separation consists of many hundreds of planks, and a solid bulwark of timbers more than a foot thick, besides an inner "skin," the whole being held together by innumerable iron and oaken bolts and trenails, and tightened with oakum and pitch. We had almost fallen into this error—or poetical laxity of expression—by saying that, on the night of which we write, little did Miss Tippet know that she was separated from, not death exactly, but from something very awful, by a single plank; at least, by the floor of her own residence, and the ceiling of the house below—as the sequel will show.

That same night, David Boone, gaunt, tall, and cadaverous as of old, sat in his back parlour, talking with his friend Gorman.

"Now, Boone," said the latter, with an oath, "I'm not goin' to hang off and on any longer. It's more than seven years since we planned this business, the insurances have been effected, you've bin a prosperous man, yet here you are, deeper in my debt than ever."

"Quite true," replied Boone, whose face was so pale that he might have easily been mistaken for a ghost, "but you know I have paid up my premiums quite regular, and your interest too, besides clearin' off some of the principal. Come, don't be hard on me, Gorman. If it had not been that trade has got worse of late, I would have cleared off all I owe you, but indeed, indeed I have not been so successful of late, and I'm again in difficulties. If you will only wait—"

"No," cried Gorman, "I'll not wait. I have waited long enough. How long would you have me wait—eh? Moreover, I'm not hard on you. I show you an easy way to make a good thing of it, and you're so chicken-hearted that you're afraid to do it."

"It's such a mean thing to do," said Boone.

"Mean! Why, what do you call the style of carrying on business that you started with seven years ago, and have practised more or less ever since?"

"That is mean, too," said Boone; "I'm ashamed of it; sorry for it. It was for a time successful no doubt, and I have actually paid off all my creditors except yourself, but I don't think it the less mean on that account, and I'm thoroughly ashamed of it."

There was a good deal of firmness in Boone's tone as he said this, and his companion was silent for a few minutes.

"I have arranged," he said at last, "about your making over your policies of insurance to me as security for the debt you owe me. You won't have to pay them next half-year, I'll do that for you *if necessary*." He laughed as he said this. "I have now come to ask you to set the house alight, and have the plan carried out, and the whole affair comfortably settled."

Gorman said this in an encouraging voice, assuming that his dupe was ready to act.

"B–but it's awful to think of," said Boone; "suppose it's found out?"

"How can it be found out?"

"Well, I don't know. It's wonderful how crime is discovered," said Boone despondingly; "besides, think of the risk we run of burning the people who live above, as well as my two clerks who sleep in the room below us; that would be murder, you know. I'm sure I have tried my very best to get Miss Tippet to go from home for a short time, I've almost let the cat out of the bag in my anxiety, but she won't take the hint."

"Oho!" exclaimed Gorman, with a laugh.

"Well, have you made the arrangements as I directed you last night?"

"Yes, I've got a lot of tarry oakum scattered about, and there is a pile of shavings," he added, pointing to a corner of the room; "the only thing I'm anxious about is that my young man Robert Roddy caught me pouring turpentine on the walls and floor of the shop. I pretended that it was water I had in the can, and that I was sprinkling it to lay the dust before sweeping up. Roddy is a slow, stupid youth; he always was, and, I daresay, did not notice the smell."

Gorman was himself filled with anxiety on hearing the first part of this, but at the conclusion he appeared relieved.

"It's lucky you turned it off so," said he, "and Roddy *is* a stupid fellow. I daresay he has no suspicion. In fact, I am sure of it."

"It's not of much importance *now*, however," said Boone, rising and confronting his friend with more firmness than he had ever before exhibited to him, "because I have resolved *not to do it*."

Gorman lit his pipe at the fire, looking at the bowl of it with a scornful smile as he replied—

"Oh! you have made up your mind, have you?"

"Yes, decidedly. Nothing will move me. You may do your worst."

"Very good," remarked Gorman, advancing with the lighted paper towards the heap of shavings.

Boone sprang towards him, and, seizing his arms, grasped the light and crushed it out.

"What would you do, madman?" he cried. "You can only ruin me, but do you not know that I will have the power to denounce you as a fire-raiser?"

Gorman laughed, and returned to the fireplace, while Boone sat down on a chair almost overcome with terror.

"What! you dare to defy me?" said Gorman, with an air of assumed pity. "A pretty case you would have to make out of it. You fill your shop with combustibles, you warn your tenant upstairs to get out of the premises for a time in a way that must be quite unaccountable to her (until the fire accounts for it), and your own clerk sees you spilling turpentine about the place the day before the fire occurs, and yet you have the stupidity to suppose that people will believe you when you denounce *me*!"

Poor David Boone's wits seemed to be sharpened by his despair, for he said suddenly, after a short pause—

"If the case is so bad it will tell against yourself, Gorman, for I shall be certainly convicted, and the insurance will not be paid to you."

"Ay, but the case is not so bad as it looks," said Gorman, "if you only have the sense to hold your tongue and do what you are told; for nobody knows all these things but you and me, and nobody can put them together except ourselves—d'ye see?"

"It matters not," said Boone firmly; "I *won't* do it—there!"

Both men leaped up. At the same moment there was a sound as of something falling in the shop. They looked at each other.

"Go see what it is," said Gorman.

The other stepped to the door.

"It's only two of my wax-dolls tumbled off the shelf," he said on returning.

An exclamation of horror escaped him, for he saw that the heap of shavings had been set on fire during his momentary absence, and Gorman stood watching them with a demoniacal grin.

Boone was struck dumb. He could not move or speak. He made a feeble effort to stretch out his hands as if to extinguish the fire, but Gorman seized him in his powerful grasp and held him fast. In a few seconds the flames were leaping up the walls, and the room was so full of smoke that they were driven into the front shop.

"Now, then," said Gorman in a fierce whisper, "your *only* chance is to act out your part as wisely as you can. Shout *fire*! now till you're black in the face—fire! *Fire*!! *Fire*!!!"

David Boone obeyed with all his might, and, when Gorman released him, ran back into the parlour to try to extinguish the flames, but he was driven back again, scorched and half-choked, while Gorman ran off at full speed to the nearest station, gave the alarm, received the shilling reward for being first to give the call, and then went leisurely home to bed.

Chapter Twenty Eight.

At the Post of Duty.

Fire! There is something appalling in the cry to most ears; something deadly in the sound; something that tells of imminent danger and urgent haste. After David Boone's first alarm was given, other voices took it up; passers-by became suddenly wild, darted about spasmodically and shouted it; late sitters-up flung open their windows and proclaimed it; sleepers awoke crying, "What! where?" and, huddling on their clothes, rushed out to look at it; little boys yelled it; frantic females screamed it, and in a few minutes the hubbub in Poorthing Lane swelled into a steady roar.

Among the sound sleepers in that region was Miss Deemas. The fair head of that lady reposed on its soft pillow all unconscious of the fact that she was even then being gently smoked before being roasted alive.

Miss Tippet, on the very first note of alarm, bounced out of bed with an emphatic "There!" which was meant to announce the triumphant fulfilment of an old prophecy which she had been in the habit of making for some time past; namely, that Matty Merryon would certainly set the house on fire if she did not take care!

The energy with which Miss Tippet sprang to the floor and exclaimed "There!" caused Emma Ward to open her eyes to the utmost possible extent, and exclaim, "Where?"

Without waiting for a reply she too bounded out of bed like an indiarubber ball, and seeing (for there was always a night-light in the room) that Miss Tippet's face was as white as her night-dress, she attempted to shriek, but failed, owing to a lump of some kind that had got somehow into her throat, and which refused to be swallowed on any terms.

The repetition of the cry, "Fire! fire!" outside, induced both ladies at once to become insane. Miss Tippet, with a touch of method even in her madness, seized the counterpane, wrapped it round her, and rushed out of the room and downstairs. Emma followed her example with a blanket, and also fled, just as Matty Merryon, who slept in an

attic room above, tumbled down her wooden staircase and burst into the room by another door, uttering a wild exclamation that was choked in the bud partly by terror, partly by smoke. Attempting in vain to wrap herself in a bolster, Matty followed her mistress. All three had utterly forgotten the existence of Miss Deemas. That strong-minded lady being, as we have hinted, a sound sleeper, was not awakened by the commotion in the street. In fact, she was above such weaknesses. Becoming aware of a crackling sound and a sensation of smoke, she smiled sweetly in her slumbers, and, turning gently on her other side, with a sigh, dreamed ardently of fried ham and eggs—her usual breakfast.

While these events were occurring the cry of fire had reached the ears of one of London's guardians; our friend Samuel Forest. That stout-hearted man was seated at the time rapping the sides of his sentry-box with his head, in a useless struggle with sleep. He had just succumbed, and was snoring out his allegiance to the great conqueror, when the policeman on the beat dashed open his door and shouted "Fire!"

Sam was a calm, self-possessed man. He was no more flurried by this sudden, unexpected, and fierce shout of "Fire," than he would have been if the policeman had in a mild voice made a statement of water. But, although self-possessed and cool, Sam was not slow. With one energetic effort he tripped up and floored the conqueror with one hand, as it were, while he put on his black helmet with the other, and in three minutes more the fire-escape was seen coming up the lane like a rampant monster of the antediluvian period.

It was received by the crowd with frantic cheers, because they had just become aware that a lady was asleep in one of the upper rooms, which were by that time unapproachable, owing to the lower part of the staircase having caught fire.

The fact was made known with a sudden look of horror by Miss Tippet, who, with Emma Ward, had been rescued from the first-floor window by a gallant policeman. This man, having procured a ladder, entered the house at considerable personal risk, and carried the ladies out in safety, one after the other; an event, we may remark in passing, which is not of rare occurrence at London fires, where the police are noted for their efficient services and for the daring of some of the members of the force, many of whom have received medals

and other rewards for acts of personal daring in attempting to save life before the firemen had arrived on the ground.

Having put Miss Tippet and Emma in a place of security, the policeman was about to make a desperate attempt to reach the upper floor by rushing through the flames, when the escape came up and rendered it unnecessary.

Dozens of tongues and hundreds of voices directed Sam Forest to the right window. He pointed his escape towards it, but so vigorous was the uninvited assistance lent by the crowd that the head of the machine went crashing through it and dashed the frame into the middle of the room.

To say that Miss Deemas was horror-struck by such an awakening would be to use a mild expression. Her strong mind was not strong enough to prevent her strong body from trembling like an aspen leaf, as she lay for a few moments unable to cry or move. Suddenly she believed that she was dreaming, and that the instrument which had burst through her window was a nightmare or a guillotine, and she made dreadful efforts to pinch herself awake without success. Next moment a man's head, looking very grim in the light of a bull's-eye lamp, appeared at the top of the guillotine. So far this was in keeping with her idea; but when the head leapt into the room, followed by its relative body, and made a rush at her, Miss Deemas cast courage and philosophy to the dogs, gave herself over to abject fear, uttered a piercing shriek, dipped her head under the bedclothes, and, drawing her knees up to her mouth, clasped her hands over them in agony.

"Come, ma'am, don't take on so; no time to lose; floor's goin' down!" said Sam. He coughed as he said it, for the smoke was getting thicker every moment.

Shriek upon shriek was the only answer vouchsafed by the terrified Eagle. A wild cheer from the mob outside seemed to be a reply of encouragement to her; but it was not so; it was called forth by the sudden appearance of a fire-engine dashing round the corner of the lane.

"Be quiet, my good lady," said Sam Forest in a voice of tenderness; but if his voice was tender his actions were the reverse, for it was

now a matter of life or death; so he grasped the Eagle, bedclothes and all, in his arms, and bore her to the window.

It is probable that this act revived in Miss Deemas some reminiscences of her childhood, for she suddenly straightened herself out and struggled violently, after the manner of those sweet little ones who *won't* be made to sit on nurse's knees. Being a tall, heavy woman, she struggled out of Sam's grasp and fell to the floor; but her victory was short-lived. Another moment and that bold man had her round the waist, in a grasp from which she could not free herself. Sam was considerate, however, and polite even in this extremity. He begged pardon as he wrapped the bedclothes round his victim, and lifting her into the head of the escape, let her go.

No swoop that the Eagle ever made (mentally) down upon base, unworthy, arrogant man, was at all comparable to the descent which she made (physically) on that occasion into the arms of an expectant fireman! She held her breath, also the blankets, tightly, as she went down like a lightning-flash, and felt that she was about to be dashed to pieces, but to her surprise soft cushions received her, and she was immediately borne, by another of these desperate men in helmets, into an adjoining house, and left unhurt in the arms of her sympathetic friend Miss Tippet.

"Oh, my dear, *dear* Julia!" exclaimed Miss Tippet, shutting the door of the room into which they had been ushered, and assisting her friend to disentangle herself from the bedclothes. "Oh! what a mercy we've not all been roasted alive like beef steaks—or—oh! *what* a sight you are, my darling! You must have got it coming down that dreadful thing—the what's-'is-name, you know. Shall I ring for water?"

"Tut, nonsense!" exclaimed the Eagle, panting as well from nervous excitement as exhaustion; "you are always so fussy, Emelina. Please assist me to tie this string, Miss Ward."

"Yes, I know I'm fussy, dear Julia!" exclaimed Miss Tippet, bustling nervously about the room; "but I can't help it, and I'm so thankful for—; but it was so bold in these noble fellows to risk their lives to—
"

"Noble fellows!" shouted Miss Deemas, with flashing eyes, "d'you call it noble to pull me out of bed, and roll me in a blanket and shoot me down a—a—I don't know what, like a sack of coals? Noble fellows, indeed! Brutes!"

Here Miss Deemas clasped her hands above her head in a passion of conflicting feelings, and, being unable to find words for utterance, burst into a flood of tears, dropped into a chair, and covered her face with both hands.

"Dear, dear, *darling* Julia!" said Miss Tippet soothingly.

"Don't speak to me!" sobbed the Eagle passionately, and stamping her foot; "I can't bear to think of it."

"But you know, dear," persevered her friend, "they could not help being—being—what d'you call it?—energetic, you know, for it was not rough. We should all have been roasted to death but for them, and I feel very, *very* grateful to them. I shall respect that policeman as long as I live."

"Ah, sure an' he *is* a dacent boy now," said Matty Merryon, who entered the room just then; "the way he lifted you an' Miss Emma up an' flung ye over his showlder, as aisy as if ye was two bolsters, was beautiful to look at; indade it was. Shure it remimbered me o' the purty pottery ye was readin' just the other night, as was writ by O'Dood or O'Hood—"

"Hood," suggested Miss Tippet.

"P'r'aps it was," said Matty; "he'd be none the worse of an O before his name anyhow. But the pottery begood with— 'Take her up tinderly, lift her with care,' if I don't misremimber."

"*Will* you hold your tongue!" cried the Eagle, looking up suddenly and drying her eyes.

"Surely, miss," said Matty, with a toss of her head; "anything to plaize ye."

It is due to Matty to say that, while the policeman was descending the ladder with her mistress, she had faithfully remained to comfort

and encourage Emma; and after Emma was rescued she had quietly descended the ladder without assistance, having previously found time to clothe herself in something a little more ample and appropriate than a bolster.

But where was David Boone all this time? Rather say, where was he not? Everywhere by turns, and nowhere long, was David to be seen, in the frenzy of his excitement. Conscience-smitten, for what he had done, or rather intended to do, he ran wildly about, making the most desperate efforts to extinguish the fire.

No one knows what he can do till he is tried. That is a proverb (at least if it is not it ought to be) which embraces much deep truth. The way in which David Boone set personal danger at defiance, and seemed to regard suffocation by smoke or roasting by fire as terminations of life worth courting, was astounding, and rendered his friends and neighbours dumb with amazement.

David was now on the staircase among the firemen, fighting his way up through fire and smoke, for the purpose of saving Miss Tippet, until he was hauled forcibly back by Dale or Baxmore—who were in the thick of it as usual. Anon, down in the basement, knee-deep in water, searching for the bodies of his two shopmen, both of whom were standing comfortably outside, looking on. Presently he was on the leads of the adjoining house, directing, commanding, exhorting, entreating, the firemen there to point their branch at the "blue bedroom." Soon after he was in the street, tearing his hair, shouting that it was all his fault; that he did it, and that it would kill him.

Before the fire was put out, poor Boone's eyelashes and whiskers were singed off; little hair was left on his head, and that little was short and frizzled. His clothes, of course, were completely soaked; in addition to which, they were torn almost to shreds, and some of his skin was in the same condition. At last he had to be forcibly taken in charge, and kept shut up in an adjoining house, from the window of which he watched the destruction of his property and his hopes.

Almost superhuman efforts had been made by the firemen to save the house. Many a house in London had they saved that year, partially or wholly; as, indeed, is the case every year, and many thousands of pounds' worth of property had they rescued; but this case utterly defied them. So well had the plot been laid; so

thoroughly had the combustibles been distributed and lubricated with inflammable liquids, that all the engines in the metropolis would have failed to extinguish that fire.

David Boone knew this, and he groaned in spirit. The firemen knew it not, and they worked like heroes.

There was a shout at last among the firemen to "look out!" It was feared one of the partition walls was coming down, so each man beat a hasty retreat. They swarmed out at the door like bees, and were all safe when the wall fell—all safe, but one, Joe Corney, who, being a reckless man, took things too leisurely, and was knocked down by the falling bricks.

Moxey and Williams ran back, and carried him out of danger. Then, seeing that he did not recover consciousness, although he breathed, they carried him at once to the hospital. The flames of the burning house sprang up, just then, as if they leaped in triumph over a fallen foe; but the polished surface of poor Joe's helmet seemed to flash back defiance at the flames as they bore him away.

After the partition wall fell, the fire sank, and in the course of a few hours it was extinguished altogether. But nothing whatever was saved, and the firemen had only the satisfaction of knowing that they had done their best, and had preserved the adjoining houses, which would certainly have gone, but for their untiring energy.

By this time, David Boone, besides being mad, was in a raging fever. The tenant of the house to which he had been taken was a friend, as well as a neighbour of his own—a greengrocer, named Mrs Craw, and she turned out to be a good Samaritan, for she insisted on keeping Boone in her house, and nursing him; asserting stoutly, and with a very red face (she almost always asserted things stoutly, and with a red face), that Mister Boone was one of 'er best an' holdest friends, as she wouldn't see 'im go to a hospital on charity—which she despised, so she did—as long as there was a spare bed in her 'ouse, so there was—which it wasn't as long as could be wished, considerin' Mister Boone's height; but that could be put right by knocking out the foot-board, and two cheers, so it could—and as long she had one copper to rub on another; no, though she was to be flayed alive for her hospitality. By which round statement, Mrs Craw was understood to imply a severe rebuke to Mrs Grab—another

greengrocer over the way (and a widow)—who had been heard to say, during the progress of the fire, that it served Boone right, and that she wouldn't give him a helping hand in his distress on any account whatever.

Why Mrs Grab was so bitter and Mrs Craw so humane is a matter of uncertainty; but it was generally believed that the former having had a matrimonial eye on Boone, and that Boone having expressed general objections to matrimony—besides having gone of late to Mrs Craw for his vegetables—had something to do with it.

Next day, D. Gorman happened, quite in a casual way of course, to saunter into Poorthing Lane; and it was positively interesting to note—as many people did note—the surprise and consternation with which he received the news of the fire from the people at the end of the lane who first met him, and who knew him well.

"Wery sad, ain't it, sir?" said a sympathetic barber. "He was sitch a droll dog too. He'll be quite a loss to the neighbourhood; won't he, sir?"

"I hope he won't," said Gorman, loud enough to be heard by several persons who lounged about their doors. "I hope to see him start afresh, an' git on better than ever, poor fellow; at least, I'll do all *I* can to help him."

"Ah! you've helped him already, sir, more than once, I believe; at least so he told me," said the barber, with an approving nod.

"Well, so I have," returned Gorman modestly, "but he may be assured that any trifle he owes me won't be called for just now. In fact, my small loan to him is an old debt, which I might have got any time these last six years, when he was flourishing; so I'm not going to press him now, poor fellow. He's ill, you say?"

"Yes, so I'm told; raither serious too."

"That's very sad; where is he?"

"With Mrs Craw, sir, the greengrocer."

"Ah, I'll go and see him. Good-day."

Gorman passed on, with as much benignity thrown into his countenance as it could contain; and the barber observed, as he re-entered his shop, that, "that man was a better fellow than he looked."

But Gorman's intentions, whatever they might have been, were frustrated at that time; for he found Boone in high fever, and quite delirious. He did not, however, quit the house without putting, as he expressed it, at least one spoke in his wheel; for he conducted himself in such a way towards Mrs Craw, and expressed so much feeling for her friend "and his," that he made quite a favourable impression on that worthy woman. He also left a sovereign, wherewith to purchase any little luxuries for the sick man, that might be conducive to his health and comfort, and went away with the assurance that he would look in to inquire for him as often as he could.

Chapter Twenty Nine.

Willie Willders in Difficulties.

Mr Thomas Tippet, beaming and perspiring as of old, was standing at his bench, chisel in hand, and Willie Willders was standing with his back to the fire, and his legs pretty wide apart; not because he preferred that *dégagé* attitude, but because Chips and Puss were asleep side by side between his feet.

It must not be supposed that although Willie had changed so much since the first day he stood there, an equal change had taken place in Mr Tippet. By no means. He was a little stouter, perhaps, but in all other respects he was the same man. Not a hair greyer, nor a wrinkle more.

The workshop, too, was in exactly the same state, only a little more crowded in consequence of numerous models having been completed and shelved during the last seven years. There was, however something new in the shape of a desk with some half-finished plans upon it; for Willie had gradually introduced a little genuine engineering into the business.

At first, naturally enough, the boy had followed his employer's lead, and, as we have said before, being very ingenious, as well as enthusiastic, had entered with all his heart and head into the absurd schemes of his patron; but as he became older he grew wiser. He applied himself to reading and study at home in the evenings with indomitable perseverance.

The result of his application was twofold. In the first place he discovered that he was very ignorant and that there existed a huge illimitable field of knowledge worth entering on seriously. His early training having been conducted (thanks to his mother) "in the fear of the Lord," he regarded things that are spiritual, and have God and man's duty to Him for their object, as part—the chief part—of that great field of knowledge; not as a separate field which may or may not be entered on according to taste. In the second place, he began to discover that his kind-hearted employer was a monomaniac. In other words, that, although sane enough in all other matters, he was

absolutely mad in regard to mechanical discoveries and inventions, and that most of the latter were absolutely nonsensical.

This second discovery induced him to prosecute his studies with all the more energy, in order that he might be prepared for the battle of life, in case his existing connection with Mr Tippet should be dissolved.

His studies naturally took an engineering turn, and, being what is termed a thorough-going fellow, he did not rest until he had dived into mathematics so deep that we do not pretend to follow him, even in the way of description. Architecture, surveying, shipbuilding, and cognate subjects, claimed and obtained his earnest attention; and year after year, on winter nights, did he sit at the side of the fire in the little house at Notting Hill, adding to his stores of knowledge on these subjects; while his meek old mother sat darning socks or patching male attire on the other side of the fire with full as much perseverance and assiduity. One consequence of this was that Willie Willders, having begun as a Jack-of-all trades, pushed on until he became a philosopher-of-all-trades, and of many sciences too, so that it would have been difficult to find his match between Charing Cross and Primrose Hill.

And Willie was not changeable. True to his first love, he clung with all the ardour of youth to fire, fire-engines, and the fire-brigade. He would have become a member of the latter if he could, but that was in the circumstances impossible. He studied the subject, however, and knew its history and its working details from first to last. He did his best to invent new engines and improve on old ones; but in such matters he usually found that his inventions had been invented, and his improvements made and improved upon, long before. Such checks, however, did not abate his ardour one jot. He persevered in his varied courses until he worked himself into a species of business which could exist only in London, which it would be difficult to describe, and which its practitioner styled "poly-artism" with as much boldness as if the word were in Johnson's Dictionary!

Standing on the hearth, as we have said, Willie related to his friend all he knew in regard to the Cattley family, and wound up with an anxious demand what was to be done for them.

Mr Tippet, leaning on his bench and looking into Willie's face with a benignant smile, said—

"Done, my boy? why, help 'em of course."

"Ay, but how?" asked Willie.

"How?" cried Mr Tippet; "why, by giving 'em money. You are aware that I stopped their allowance because Cattley senior went and drank it as soon as he got it, and Cattley junior is able to support himself, and I was not until now aware that the poor daughter was killing herself to support her father; but as I do know it now I'll continue the allowance and increase it, and we shall give it into the daughter's hands, so that the father won't be able to mis-spend it."

Mr Tippet's visage glowed with ardour as he stated this arrangement, but the glow was displaced by a look of anxiety as he observed that Willie shook his head and looked as perplexed as ever.

"If that plan would have availed I would have tried it long ago," said he, with a sad smile, "for my income is a pretty good one, thanks to you, sir—"

"Thanks to your own genius, Willie, for the remarkable and prolific offshoots which you have caused to sprout from this dry old root," said Mr Tippet, interrupting, as he glanced round the room with an air of affection, which showed that he loved the root dearly, despite its age and dryness.

"Not the less thanks to you, sir," said Willie, in the deferential tone which he had assumed involuntarily towards his patron almost from the commencement of their intercourse; "but Z——a—Miss Cattley positively refuses to accept of money from anyone in charity, as long as she can work."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr Tippet, shaking his head slowly, "pride, simple pride. Not laudable pride, observe. She deceives herself, no doubt, into the belief that it is laudable, but it is not; for, when a girl cannot work without working herself into her grave, it is her duty *not* to work, and it is the duty as well as the privilege of her friends to support her. Truth is truth, Willie, and we must not shrink from stating it because a few illogical thinkers are apt to misunderstand it,

or because there are a number of mean-spirited wretches who would be too glad to say that they could not work without injuring their health if they could, by so doing, persuade their friends to support them. What! are those whom God has visited with weakness of body to be made to toil and moil far beyond their strength in order to prove that they do not belong to the class of deceivers and sycophants? Yet public opinion in regard to this matter of what is called self-respect and proper pride compels many hundreds who urgently require assistance to refuse it, and dooms many of them to a premature grave, while it does not shut the maw of a single one of the other class. Why, sir, Miss Cattley is committing suicide; and, in regard to her father, who is dependent on her, she is committing murder—murder, sir!"

Mr Tippet's eyes flashed with indignation, and he drove the chisel deep down into the bench, as if to give point and force to his sentiment, as well as an illustration of the dreadful idea with which he concluded.

Willie admitted that there was much truth in Mr Tippet's observations, but did not quite agree with him in his sweeping condemnation of Ziza.

"However," continued Mr Tippet, resuming his quiet tone and benignant aspect, "I'll consider the matter. Yes, I'll consider the matter and see what's to be done for 'em."

He leaped from the bench with a quiet chuckle as he said this and began to saw vigorously, while Willie went to his desk in the corner and applied himself to an abstruse calculation, considerably relieved in mind, for he had unbounded belief in the fertility of Mr Tippet's imagination, and he knew well that whatever that old gentleman promised he would certainly fulfil.

Chapter Thirty.

The Best-Laid Plans.

There were other men besides Mr Tippet who could be true to their promises when it suited them.

D. Gorman was true to his, in so far as they concerned David Boone. He visited that unfortunate invalid so frequently, and brought him so many little "nice things" for the alleviation of his sufferings, and exhibited altogether such nervous anxiety about his recovery, that worthy Mrs Craw was quite overwhelmed, and said, in the fulness of her heart, that she never did see a kinder friend, or one who more flatly gave the lie-direct to his looks, which, she was bound to admit, were not prepossessing.

But, despite his friend's solicitude, and his doctor's prescriptions, and his nurse's kindness, David Boone continued steadily to sink, until at last the doctor gave it as his opinion that he would not recover.

One afternoon, soon after the expression of this opinion, Gorman called on his friend, and was shown as usual into his chamber. It was a wet, cold, stormy afternoon, and the window rattled violently in its frame.

Boone was much better that afternoon. It seemed as if he had just waited for the doctor to pronounce his unfavourable opinion in order to have the satisfaction of contradicting it.

"He's better to-day, sir," said Mrs Craw, in a whisper.

"Better!" exclaimed Gorman with a look of surprise, "I'm glad to hear that—very glad."

He looked as if he were very sorry, but then, as Mrs Craw said, his looks belied him.

"He's asleep now, sir; the doctor said if he slept he was on no account to be waked up, so I'll leave you to sit by him, sir, till he wakes, and, please, be as quiet as you can."

Mrs Craw left the room on tip-toe, and Gorman went to the bedside and looked on the sick man's wasted features with a frown.

"Ha! you're asleep, are you, and not to be waked up—eh? Come, I'll rouse you."

He shook him violently by the shoulder, and Boone awoke with a start and a groan.

"Hope I didn't disturb you, Boone," said his friend in a quiet voice. "I came to inquire for you."

Boone started up in his bed and stared wildly at some object which appeared to be at the foot of the bed. Gorman started too, and turned pale as his eyes followed those of the invalid.

"What is it you see, Boone?"

"There, there!" he whispered hoarsely, clutching Gorman's arm as if for protection, "look, I heard his voice just now; oh! save me from that man; he—he—wants to kill me!"

"Come, David," said Gorman soothingly, "it's only a fancy—there's nobody there—nobody in the room but me."

"And who are you?" inquired the sick man, falling back exhausted, while he gazed vacantly at his friend.

"Don't you know me, David?"

"Never mind, shut your eyes now and try to sleep. It'll be time to take your physic soon."

"Physic!" cried Boone, starting up in alarm, and again clutching Gorman's arm. "You won't let *him* give it me, will you? Oh! say you won't—promise to give it me yourself!"

Gorman promised, and a very slight but peculiar smile turned up the corners of his mouth as he did so.

Boone again sank back on his pillow, and Gorman sat down on a chair beside him. His villainous features worked convulsively, for in his heart he was meditating a terrible deed. That morning he had been visited by Ned Hooper, who in the most drunken of voices told him, "that it wash 'mposh'ble to git a body f'r love or munny, so if 'e wanted one he'd better cut's own throat."

His plans having miscarried in this matter, Gorman now meditated taking another and more decided step. He looked at the sick man, and, seeing how feeble he was, his fingers twitched as if with a desire to strangle him. So strong was the feeling upon him that he passed his fingers nervously about his own throat, as if to ascertain the formation of it and the precise locality of the windpipe. Then his hand dropped to his side, and he sat still again, while Boone rolled his poor head from side to side and moaned softly.

Evening drew on apace, and the shadows in the sick-room gradually became deeper and deeper until nothing could be seen distinctly. Still Gorman sat there, with his features pale as death, and his fingers moving nervously; and still the sick man lay and rolled his head from side to side on the pillow. Once or twice Gorman rose abruptly, but he as often sat down again without doing anything.

Suddenly a ray of bright light shot through the window. Gorman started and drew back in alarm. It was only a lamp-lighter who had lighted one of the street-lamps, and the ray which he had thus sent into the sick-chamber passed over the bed. It did not disturb Boone, for the curtains were between him and it, but it disturbed Gorman, for it fell on the chimney-piece and illuminated a group of phials, one of which, half full of a black liquid, was labelled "*Poison*!"

Gorman started up, and this time did not sit down, but with a trembling step moved to the fireplace. He stretched out his hand to grasp the bottle, and almost overturned it, for just at the moment his own figure intercepted the ray of light, and threw the spot where it stood into deep shadow.

"What's that?" asked Boone.

"It's only me," said Gorman, "getting you your physic. I almost upset it in the dark. Here now, drink it off. I can't find the cup, but you can take it out of the bottle."

"You won't let *him* come near when you give it, will you?" asked Boone anxiously.

"No, no; come, open your mouth."

Boone hesitated to do so, but Gorman used a little force. His hands were steady now! His heart was steeled to the deed, and the cry which Boone was about to utter was choked by the liquid flowing down his throat.

Gorman had flung him back with such violence that he lay stunned, while the murderer replaced the bottle on the chimney-piece and hurried to the door. A gentle knock at it arrested him, but his indecision was momentary. He opened the door softly, and going out, said to Mrs Craw in a whisper—

"He's sleeping now. I found it hard to get him to give up talking, for he waked up soon after I went in; but he's all right now. I suppose the medicine is beginning to operate; he told me he took it himself just before I came in."

"Took it himself!" exclaimed Mrs Craw. "Impossible."

"Well, I don't know, but he's better now. I would let him rest a while if I were you."

"Stay, sir! I'll go fetch a light," said Mrs Craw.

"Never mind; I know the stair well," said Gorman hurriedly; "don't mind a light; I shan't want it."

He was right. If any man ever wanted darkness rather than light—thick, heavy, impenetrable darkness—it was D. Gorman at that time.

"Took it himself!" repeated Mrs Craw in unabated surprise as she closed the street door. "It's impossible. He's got no more strength than an unborn hinfant. I must go an' see to this."

Lighting a candle, she went softly into the sick chamber and looked at the invalid, who was apparently asleep, but breathing heavily. She

then went to the chimney-piece and began to examine the phials there.

"My!" she exclaimed suddenly, with a look of alarm, "if he han't bin an' drunk up all the tinctur' o' rhubarb! An' the laudanum-bottle standin' close beside it too! *What* a mercy he didn't drink that! Well, lucky for him there wasn't much in it, for an overdose of anything in his state would be serious."

Full of her discovery, Mrs Craw set the candle on the table, and sat down on the chair by the bedside to think about it; but the more she thought about it the more puzzled she was.

"Took it himself," she said, reverting to Gorman's words. "Impossible!"

She continued to shake her head and mutter "Impossible" for some time, while she stared at the candle as if she expected that *it* would solve the mystery. Then she got up and examined the bedclothes, and found that a good deal of the rhubarb had been spilt on the sheets, and that a good deal more of it had been spilt on Boone's chin and chest; after which her aspect changed considerably, as, setting down the candle, she resumed her seat and said—

"Took it himself! Impossible!"

Darkness! If ever a man sought darkness in vain, and found light, bright blazing light, everywhere, it was Gorman. At first, in a burst of frenzy, he rushed away at full speed. It was well for him that the wind had increased to a hurricane and the rain was blinding, else had he been stopped on suspicion, so fierce was his mien, so haggard his look, so wild his race. Gradually his pace slackened, and gradually as well as naturally he gravitated to his old familiar haunts; but go where he would, there was light everywhere except within his own breast. It was all darkness there.

It is true the sky was dark enough, for the war of elements was so great that it seemed to have been blotted out with ink, but the shops appeared to have been lit up more brilliantly than usual. Every lamp poured a flood of light around it. The lanterns of the cabs and

omnibuses sent rich beams of light through the air, and the air itself, laden as it was with moisture, absorbed a portion of light, and invested everything with a halo. Light, light! all round, and the light of conscience within rendering the darkness there visible, and shining on the letters of a word written in dark red—"Murderer!"

Gorman tried to extinguish the light, but it was a fire that would not be put out. He cursed the shop-windows and the lamps for shining so brightly on him; he cursed the few people whose curiosity induced them to pause and look back at him, and he cursed himself for being such a fool.

On reaching Cheapside he began to recover his self-possession, and to walk in the storm as other men did. But in proportion as his composure returned the enormity of his crime became more apparent to him, and the word written in red letters became so bright that he felt as if every passer-by must read it, unless he dropt his eyes to prevent their seeing through them into his soul.

At London Bridge he became nervously apprehensive. Each unusually quick footstep startled him. Every policeman was carefully avoided, and anything approaching to a shout behind caused him to start into an involuntary run. Despite his utmost efforts to control himself, the strong man was unmanned; a child could have made him fly.

He was about to cross London Bridge, when he observed a policeman taking shelter under the parapet, and apparently watching those who passed him. Gorman could not make up his mind to go on, so he turned aside and descended the nearest stairs.

The policeman had doubtless been watching for someone, or suspected Gorman because of his undecided movements, for he followed him. The latter observed this and quickened his pace. The instant he was hidden from his pursuer, he darted away at full speed, and did not halt until he stood at the foot of one of the stairs where wherries are usually to be found. The sight that met his gaze there might have overawed the most reckless of men.

A hurricane was raging such as is not often experienced in our favoured island. The wind blew, not in gusts and squalls, but in one continuous roar, lashing the Thames into crested waves, tearing

ships from their moorings, and dashing them against other ships, which were likewise carried away, and swept downward with the tide. Dozens of barges were sunk, and the shrieks of their crews were heard sometimes rising above the storm.

The gale was at its height when Gorman came into full view of the Thames. A waterman, who was crouching for shelter in the angle of a warehouse, observed him, and came forward.

"An awful night, sir," he said.

"Yes," answered Gorman curtly. He started as he spoke, for he heard, or he fancied he heard, a shout behind him.

"Is that your boat?" said he.

"It is," replied the waterman in surprise, "you don't want to go on the water on such a night, do you?"

"Yes, I do," said Gorman, trembling in every limb; "come, jump in, and shove off."

At that moment a policeman came running down towards them.

"Are you mad?" exclaimed the man, grasping Gorman by the arm as he sprang toward the boat.

In a moment, Gorman struck him to the ground, and leaping into the boat pushed off, just as the policeman came up. He was whirled away instantly.

Grasping one of the oars, he was just in time to prevent the boat being dashed against one of the wooden piers of a wharf. He was desperate now. Shipping both oars he pulled madly out into the stream, but in a few moments he was swept against the port-bow of a large vessel, against the stem of which the water was curling as if the ship had been breasting the Atlantic waves before a stiff breeze. One effort Gorman made to avoid the collision, then he leaped up, and just as the boat struck, sprang at the fore-chains. He caught them and held on, but his hold was not firm; the next moment he was rolling along the vessel's side, tearing it with his nails in the vain

attempt to grasp the smooth hull. He struck against the bow of the vessel immediately behind and was swept under it.

Rising to the surface, he uttered a wild shriek, and attempted to stem the current. He was a powerful swimmer, and despair lent him energy to buffet the waves for a short time; but he was again swept away by the irresistible tide, and had almost given up hope of being saved, when his forehead was grazed by a rope which hung from a vessel's side. Seizing this, he held on, and with much difficulty succeeded in gaining the vessel's deck.

With his safety Gorman's fear of being captured returned. He hid himself behind some lumber, and while in this position wrung some of the water out of his clothes. In a few minutes he summoned courage to look about him, and discovered that the vessel was connected with the one that lay next to it by a plank. No one appeared to be moving, and it was so dark that he could not see more than four or five yards before him. To pass from one vessel to the other was the work of a few seconds. Finding that the second vessel lay moored to the quay, he sprang from it with all his might and alighted safely on the shore. From the position of the shipping he knew that he stood on the south bank of the river, having been swept right across the Thames, so he had now no further difficulty in hiding his guilty head in his own home.

Chapter Thirty One.

New Lights of Various Kinds.

Time sped on apace, and in its train came many changes.

To the confusion of the doctor and despite the would-be murderer, David Boone recovered. But that brought no relief to Gorman, whose remorse increased daily, insomuch that he became, if not quite, very nearly, insane, and his fear of being caught was so great that he never ventured near the quarter of London in which Boone dwelt. He therefore remained in ignorance of the failure of his murderous attempt. What would he not have given to have known the truth! to have had the dreadful *word* removed from the light which shone upon it brighter and brighter every day until it was made red-hot, as it were, and became within him as a consuming fire! Preferring darkness to light more than ever, Gorman kept in secret places during the day, and only ventured out, with other human vultures, at night. The wretched man feared the darkness, too, although he sought it, and what between the darkness that he feared yet courted, and the light that he feared and fled from, and the light within that he feared but could not fly from, he became one of the most miserable of all the outcasts in London.

As for his deep-laid plans they were all scattered to the winds. In the presumption of ignorance he had fancied that he knew his own power, and so in one sense he did, but he was not aware of his own want of power. He knew, indeed, that he had the brute courage to dare and do anything desperate or dastardly, but he did not know that he lacked the moral courage to bear the consequences of his deeds. The insurance policies, therefore, lay unclaimed—even uncared for!

Another change for the worse effected by time was the death of Loo Auberly. Gradually and gently her end approached. Death was so slow in coming that it was long expected, yet it was so *very* slow that when it came at last it took her friends by surprise. James Auberly continued stiff and stately to the last. He refused to believe that his child was dying, and spared no expense to provide everything that money could procure to restore her health. He also refused to be reconciled to his son Fred, who had succeeded in his loved profession beyond his expectations, and who had sought, again and

again, to propitiate his father. At last Fred resolved to go abroad and study the works of the ancient masters. He corresponded regularly with Loo for some time, but his letters suddenly ceased to make their appearance, and nothing was heard of him for many months.

During the long and weary illness Loo had three friends whose visits were to her soul like gleams of sunshine on a cloudy day—Miss Tippet, Emma Ward, and a poor artificial-flower maker named Ziza Cattley.

Those three, so different yet so like, were almost equally agreeable to the poor invalid. Miss Tippet was "*so* funny but so good," and Emma's sprightly nature seemed to charm away her pain for a time; while grave, gentle, earnest Ziza made her happy during her visits, and left a sensation of happiness after she went away. All three were equally untiring in talking with her about the "old, old story"—the Love of Jesus Christ.

Yes, it comes to this at last, if not at first, with all of us. Even the professed infidel, laugh as he may in the spring-tide of life, usually listens to that "old, old story" when life's tide is very low, if not with faith at least with seriousness, and with a hope that it may be true. *May* be true! Why, if the infidel would only give one tithe of the time and trouble and serious inquiry to the investigation of that same old story and its credentials that he gives so freely to the study of the subtleties of his art or profession, he would find that there is no historical fact whatever within his ken which can boast of anything like the amount or strength of evidence in favour of its truth, that exists in favour of the truth of the story of the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

When Loo died the stateliness and stiffness of James Auberly gave way, and the stern man, leaning his head upon the coffin, as he sat alone in the darkened room, wept as if he had been a little child.

There was yet another change brought about by that great overturner Time. But as the change to which we refer affects those who have yet to take a prominent part in our tale, we will suffer them to speak for themselves.

One afternoon, long after the occurrence of those changes to which reference has just been made, Mrs Willders, while seated quietly at

her own fireside (although there was no fire there, the month being June), was interrupted in her not unusual, though innocent, occupation of darning socks by the abrupt entrance of her son Frank, who flung his cap on the table, kissed his mother on the forehead, and then flung himself on the sofa, which piece of furniture, being old and decrepit, groaned under his weight.

"Mother," he exclaimed with animation, "I've got strange news to tell you. Is Willie at home?"

"No, but I expect him every minute. He promised to come home earlier to-day, and won't be long, for he is a boy of his word."

Mrs Willders persisted in calling her strapping sons "boys," despite the evidence to the contrary on their cheeks and chins.

"Here he comes!" cried Frank, as a rapid step was heard.

Next moment the door burst open and Willie, performing much the same ceremony that Frank had done, and in a wonderfully similar way, said he had come home with something strange to tell, though not altogether strange either, as his mother, he said, knew something about it already.

Mrs Willders smiled and glanced at Frank.

"Which is to begin first?" she asked.

"What! do you know about it, too?" cried Willie, turning to his brother.

"*Know* about what?" said Frank. "You have not told me what it is; how can I answer you?"

"About Mr Auberly," said Willie.

Frank said that he knew nothing new or peculiar about *him*, except that he was—no, he wouldn't say anything bad of him, for he must be a miserable man at that time.

"But out with your news, Willie," he added, "mine will keep; and as yours is, according to yourself, partly known already to my mother, it's as well to finish off one subject before we begin to another."

"Oh, then, you have news, too, have you?" said Willie.

Frank nodded.

"Strange coincidence!" exclaimed Willie.

"Did you ever hear of a coincidence that was not strange, lad? Go on with your news, else I'll begin before you."

Thus admonished, Willie began.

"Oh, mother, you're a nice deceiver; you're a sly old lady, ain't you? and you sit there with a face as meek and sweet and smiling as if you had never deceived anybody in all your life, not to speak of your two sons. O, fy!"

As Mrs Willders still smiled and went on with her knitting serenely, without vouchsafing a reply, Willie continued with an off-hand air—"Well, then, I may as well tell you that I have just had an interview with *Uncle* Auberly—hallo! you seem surprised."

Mrs Willders was indeed surprised. Her serenity of aspect fled in an instant.

"Oh, Willie, how comes it that you know? I'm sure I did not mean to tell you. I promised I never would. I must have let it out inadvertently, or when I was asleep."

"Make yourself quite easy, mother," said Willie; "I'll explain it all presently. Just go on with your knitting, and don't put yourself into a state."

The widow, recovering herself a little, resumed her work, and Frank, who had listened with an amused smile up to this point—supposing that his brother was jesting—elongated his face and opened his eyes wider and wider as he listened.

"You must know," resumed Willie, "that I received a note from Mr Auberly last night, asking me to call on him some time this afternoon. So I went, and found him seated in his library. Poor man, he has a different look now from what he had when I went last to see him. You know I have hardly ever seen him since that day when I bamboozled him so about 'another boy' that he expected to call. But his spirit is not much improved, I fear. 'Sit down, Mr Willders,' he said. 'I asked you to call in reference to a matter which I think it well that the parties concerned should understand thoroughly. Your brother Frank, I am told, has had the presumption to pay his addresses to Miss Ward, the young lady who lives with my relative, Miss Tippet.' 'Yes, Mr Auberly,' I replied, 'and Miss Ward has had the presumption to accept him—'"

"It was wrong of you to answer so," interrupted Mrs Willders, shaking her head.

"Wrong, mother! how could I help it? Was I going to sit there and hear him talk of Frank's presumption as if he were a chimney-sweep?"

"Mr Auberly thinks Miss Ward above him in station, and so deems his aspiring to her hand presumption," replied the widow gently. "Besides, you should have remembered the respect due to age."

"Well, but, mother," said Willie, defending himself, "it was very impudent of him, and I did speak very respectfully to him in tone if not in words. The fact is I felt nettled, for, after all, what is Miss Ward? The society she mingles in is Miss Tippet's society, and that's not much to boast of; and her father, I believe, was a confectioner—no doubt a rich one, that kept his carriage before he failed, and left his daughter almost a beggar. But riches don't make a gentleman or a lady either, mother; I'm sure you've often told me that, and explained that education, and good training, and good feelings, and polite manners, and consideration for others, were the true foundations of gentility. If that be so, mother, there are many gentlemen born who are not gentlemen bred, and many lowly born who—"

"Come, lad, don't bamboozle your mother with sophistries," interrupted Frank, "but go on to the point, and don't be so long about it."

"Well, mother," resumed Willie, "Mr Auberly gave me a harder rebuke than you have done, for he made no reply to my speech at all, but went on as quietly and coolly as if I had not opened my lips. 'Now,' said he, 'I happen to have a particular regard for Miss Ward. I intend to make her my heir, and I cannot consent to her union with a man who has *nothing*.' 'Mr Auberly,' said I (and I assure you, mother, I said this quite respectfully), 'my brother is a man who has little *money*, no doubt, but he has a good heart and a good head and a strong arm; an arm, too, which has saved life before now.' I stopped at that, for I saw it went home. 'Quite true,' he replied; 'I do not forget that he saved my lost child's life; but—but—the thing is outrageous—that a penniless man should wed the lady who is to be my heir! No, sir, I sent for you to ask you to say to your brother from me, that however much I may respect him I will not consent to this union, and if it goes on despite my wishes I shall not leave Miss Ward a shilling.' He had worked himself up into a rage by this time, and as I felt I would only make matters worse if I spoke, I held my tongue; except that I said I would deliver his message at once, as I expected to meet my brother at home. He seemed sorry for having been so sharp, however, and when I was about to leave him he tried to smile, and said, 'I regret to have to speak thus to you, sir, but I felt it to be my duty. You talk of meeting your brother to-night at home; do you not live together?' 'No, sir,' I replied; 'my brother lodges close to his station, and I live with my mother in Notting Hill.'

"'Notting Hill!' he cried, falling back in his chair as if he had been struck by a thunderbolt. 'Your mother,' he gasped, 'Mrs Willders—my sister-in-law—the waterman's widow?' 'A *sailor's* widow, sir,' said I, 'who is proud of the husband, who rose to the top of his profession.'

"'Why did you deceive me, sir?' cried Mr Auberly, with a sudden frown. 'I would have undeceived you,' said I, 'when we first met, but you dismissed me abruptly at that time, and would not hear me out. Since then, I have not thought it worth while to intrude on you in reference to so small a matter—for I did not know till this day that we are related.' He frowned harder than ever at this, and bit his lip, and then said, 'Well, young man, *this* will make no difference, I assure you. I desire you to convey my message to your brother. Leave me now.' I was just on the point of saying 'Good-bye, uncle,' but he covered his face with his hands, and looked so miserable, that I went out without a word more. There, you've got the whole of *my* story. What think you of it?"

"It's a curious one, and very unexpected, at least by me," said Frank, "though, as you said, part of it must have been known to mother, who, no doubt, had good reasons for concealing it from us; but I rather think that my story will surprise you more, and it's a better one than yours, Willie, in this respect, that it is shorter."

"Come, then, out with it," said Willie, with a laugh; "why, this is something like one of the Arabian Nights' Entertainments."

"Well, mother," said Frank, laying his hand gently on the widow's shoulder, "you shan't darn any more socks if I can help it, for I'm a man of fortune now!"

"How, Frank?" said Mrs Willders, with a puzzled look.

"The fact is, mother, that Mrs Denman, the poor old lady whom I carried down the escape, I forget how many years ago, is dead, and has left me her fortune, which, I believe, amounts to something like twenty thousand pounds!"

"You *don't* mean that!" cried Willie, starting up.

"Indeed, I do," said Frank earnestly.

"Then long life to ye, my boy!" cried Willie, wringing his brother's hand, "and success to the old—well, no, I don't exactly mean that, but if she were alive I would say my blessing on the old lady. I wish you joy, old fellow! I say, surely the stately man won't object to the penniless fireman now—ha! ha! Well, it's like a dream; but tell us all about it, Frank."

"There is very little to tell, lad. I got a very urgent message the day before yesterday to go to see an old lady who was very ill. I obtained leave for an hour, and went at once, not knowing who it was till I got there, when I found that it was Mrs Denman. She looked very ill, and I do assure you I felt quite unmanned when I looked into her little old face. 'Young man,' she said in a low voice, 'you saved my life; I am dying, and have sent for you to thank you. God bless you.' She put out her thin hand and tried to shake mine, but it was too feeble; she could only press her fingers on it. That was all that passed, and I returned to the station feeling quite in low spirits, I do assure you. Well, next day a little man in black called, and said he wished to

have a few words with me. So I went out, and he introduced himself as the old lady's lawyer, told me that she was gone, and that she had, almost with her last breath, made him promise to go, the moment she was dead, and see the fireman who had saved her life, and tell him that she had left her fortune to him. He congratulated me; said that there were no near relations to feel aggrieved or to dispute my rights, and that, as soon as the proper legal steps had been taken—the debts and legacies paid, etcetera,—he would have the pleasure of handing over the balance, which would probably amount to twenty thousand pounds."

"It's like a dream," said Willie.

"So it is," replied Frank, "but it's well that it is not a dream, for if I had been the penniless man that Mr Auberly thinks me, I would have been obliged in honour to give up Emma Ward."

"Give her up!" exclaimed Willie in amazement. "Why?"

"Why! because I could not think of standing in the way of her good fortune."

"Oh, Frank! oh, Blazes," said Willie sadly, "has money told on you so fearfully already? Do you think that *she* would give *you* up for the sake of Auberly's dross?"

"I believe not, lad; but—but—well—never mind, we won't be troubled with the question now. But, mother, you don't seem to think much of my good fortune."

"I do think much of it, Frank; it has been sent to you by the Lord, and therefore is to be received with thanksgiving. But sudden good fortune of this kind is very dangerous. It makes me anxious as well as glad."

At that moment there came a loud knocking at the door, which startled Mrs Willders, and caused Willie to leap up and rush to open it.

Frank rose and put on his cap with the quiet promptitude of a man accustomed to alarms.

"That's a fire, mother; the kind of knock is quite familiar to me now. Don't be alarmed; we hear that kind of thing about two or three times a day at the station; they knew I was here, and have sent a messenger."

"A fire!" cried Willie, running into the room in great excitement.

"Tut, lad," said Frank, with a smile, as he nodded to his mother and left the room, "you'd never do for a fireman, you're too excitable. Where's the messenger?—ah, here you are. Well, where is it?"

"Tooley Street," exclaimed a man, whose condition showed that he had run all the way.

Frank started, and looked very grave as he said hurriedly to his brother—

"Good-night, lad. I won't likely be able to get out to-morrow to talk over this matter of the fortune. Fires are usually bad in that neighbourhood. Look well after mother. Good-night."

In another moment he was gone.

And well might Frank look grave, for when a fireman is called to a fire in Tooley Street, or any part of the docks, he knows that he is about to enter into the thickest of the Great Fight. To ordinary fires he goes light-heartedly—as a bold trooper gallops to a skirmish, but to a fire in the neighbourhood of the docks he goes with something of the feeling which must fill the breast of every brave soldier on the eve of a great battle.

Chapter Thirty Two.

The Fire in Tooley Street.

One of those great calamities which visit us once or twice, it may be, in a century, descended upon London on Saturday, the 22nd of June, 1861. It was the sudden, and for the time, overwhelming, attack of an old and unconquerable enemy, who found us, as usual, inadequately prepared to meet him.

Fire has fought with us and fed upon us since we became a nation, and yet, despite all our efforts, its flames are at this day more furious than ever. There are more fires daily in London now than there ever were before. Has this foe been properly met? is a question which naturally arises out of this fact. Referring to the beautiful organisation of the present Fire Brigade, the ability of its chiefs and the courage of its men, the answer is, Yes, decidedly. But referring to the strength of the brigade; to the munitions of war in the form of water; to the means of conveyance in the form of mains; to the system of check in the shape of an *effective* Act in reference to partition-walls and moderately-sized warehouses; to the means of prevention in the shape of prohibitions and regulations in regard to inflammable substances—referring to all these things, the answer to the question, "Has the foe been properly met?" is emphatically, *No.*

It is not sufficient to reply that a special inquiry has been made into this subject; that steps are being actually taken to remedy the evils of our system (or rather of our want of system) of fire prevention. Good may or may not result from this inquiry: that is yet to be seen. Meanwhile, the public ought to be awakened more thoroughly to the fact that an enemy is and always has been abroad in our land, who might be, *if we chose,* more effectively checked; who, if he has not yet attacked our own particular dwelling, may take us by surprise any day when we least expect him, and who does at all times very materially diminish our national wealth and increase our public burdens. Perhaps we should not style *fire* an enemy, but a mutinous servant, who does his work faithfully and well, except when neglected or abused!

About five o'clock on Saturday afternoon intelligence of the outbreak of fire in Tooley Street reached the headquarters of the brigade in Watling Street.

Fire in Tooley Street! The mere summons lent energy to the nerves and spring to the muscles of the firemen. Not that Tooley Street in itself is more peculiarly dangerous in regard to fire than are the other streets of shops in the City. But Tooley Street lies in dangerous neighbourhood. The streets between it and the Thames, and those lying immediately to the west of it, contain huge warehouses and bonded stores, which are filled to suffocation with the "wealth of nations." Dirty streets and narrow lanes here lead to the fountain-head of wealth untold—almost inconceivable. The elegant filigree-work of West End luxury may here be seen unsmelted, as it were, and in the ore. At the same time the rich substances on which fire feeds and fattens are stored here in warehouses which (as they are) should never have been built, and in proximities which should never have been permitted. Examine the wharves—Brooks' Wharf, Beal's Wharf, Cotton's Wharf, Chamberlain's Wharf, Freeman's Wharf, Griffin's Wharf, Stanton's Wharf, and others. Investigate the lanes—Hay's Lane, Mill Lane, Morgan's Lane; and the streets—Bermondsey, Dockhead, Pickle Herring Street, Horsleydown, and others—and there, besides the great deposit and commission warehouses which cover acres of ground, and are filled from basement to ridge-pole with the commodities and combustibles of every clime, you will find huge granaries and stores of lead, alum, drugs, tallow, chicory, flour, rice, biscuit, sulphur, and saltpetre, mingled with the warehouses of cheese-agents, ham-factors, provision merchants, tarpaulin-dealers, oil and colour merchants, etcetera. In fact, the entire region seems laid out with a view to the raising of a bonfire or a pyrotechnic display on the grandest conceivable scale.

Little wonder, then, that the firemen of Watling Street turned out all their engines, including two of Shand and Mason's new land-steam fire-engines, which had at that time just been brought into action. Little wonder that the usual request for a man from each station was changed into an urgent demand for every man that could possibly be spared.

The fire began in the extensive wharves and warehouses known as Cotton's Wharf, near London Bridge, and was first observed in a warehouse over a counting-room by some workmen, who at once gave the alarm, and attempted to extinguish it with some buckets of water. They were quickly driven back, however, by the suffocating smoke, which soon filled the various floors so densely that no one could approach the seat of the fire.

Mr Braidwood, who was early on the spot, saw at a glance that a pitched battle was about to be fought, and, like a wise general, concentrated all the force at his command. Expresses were sent for the more distant brigade engines, and these came dashing up, one after another, at full speed. The two powerful steam floating-engines which guard the Thames from fire were moored off the wharf, two lengths of hose attached to them, and led on shore and brought to bear on the fire. A number of land-engines took up a position in Tooley Street, ready for action, but these were compelled to remain idle for nearly an hour *before water was obtainable from the fire-plugs*. O London! with all your wealth and wisdom, how strange that such words can be truly written of you!

The vessels which were lying at the wharf discharging and loading were hauled out of danger into the stream.

In course of time the engines were in full play, but the warehouse burst into flames from basement to roof in spite of them, and ere long eight of the great storehouses were burning furiously. The flames made rapid work of it, progressing towards the line of warehouses facing the river, and to the lofty building which adjoined on the Tooley Street side.

Dale and his men were quickly on the scene of action, and had their engine soon at work. Before long, Frank Willders joined them. They were playing in at the windows of a large store, which was burning so furiously that the interior appeared to be red-hot.

"Relieve Corney, lad," said Dale, as Frank came forward.

"Och, it's time!" cried Corney, delivering up the branch to Frank and Moxey; "sure Baxmore and me are melted intirely."

Frank made no reply. He and Moxey directed the branch which the others resigned, turning their backs as much as possible on the glowing fire, and glancing at it over their shoulders; for it was too hot to be faced.

Just then the Chief of the brigade came up.

"It's of no use, sir," said Dale; "we can't save these."

"True, Dale, true," said Mr Braidwood, in a quick, but quiet tone; "this block is doomed. Take your lads round to the nor'-east corner; we must try to prevent it spreading."

As he surveyed the progress of the fire, with a cool, practical eye, and hurried off to another part of the battle-field to post his men to best advantage, little did the leader of the forces think that he was to be the first to fall that day!

Engines were now playing on the buildings in all directions; but the flames were so fierce that they made no visible impression on them, and even in the efforts made to check their spreading, little success appeared to attend them at first. Warehouse after warehouse ignited.

To make matters worse, a fresh breeze sprang up, and fanned the flames into redoubled fury; so that they quickly caught hold of vast portions of the premises occupied by the firm of Scovell and Company.

"There's not a chance," said Frank to Dale, while he wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and sat down for a few seconds to recover breath; for he had just issued from a burning building, driven back by heat and smoke—

"There's not a chance of saving that block; all the iron doors that were meant to keep the fire from spreading have been left open by the workmen!"

"Chance or no chance, we must do our best," said Dale. "Come, lad, with me; I think we may get at a door inside the next warehouse, through which we might bring the branch to bear. Are you able?"

"All right," exclaimed Frank, leaping up, and following his leader through the smoke.

"Have a care!" cried Frank, pausing as a tremendous explosion caused the ground to tremble under their feet.

"It's sulphur or saltpetre," said Dale, pushing on; "there are tons upon tons of that stuff in the cellars all round."

This was indeed the case. It was said that upwards of 2,000 tons of saltpetre were in the vaults at the time; and several explosions had already taken place, though fortunately, without doing injury to any one.

Dale had already partially examined the warehouse, into which he now led Frank; and, therefore, although it was full of smoke, he moved rapidly along the narrow and intricate passages between the bales of goods, until he reached an iron door.

"Here it is; we'll open this and have a look," he said, grasping the handle and swinging the heavy door open.

Instantly, a volume of black smoke drove both the men back, almost suffocating them. They could not speak; but each knew that the re-closing of that iron door was all-important, for the fire had got nearer to it than Dale had imagined.

They both darted forward; but were again driven back, and had to rush to the open air for breath. Frank recovered before his comrade, in consequence of the latter having made a more strenuous and prolonged effort to close the door which he had so unfortunately opened.

Without a moment's hesitation, he sprang into the warehouse again; regained and partially closed the door, when the stifling smoke choked him, and he fell to the ground. A few seconds later, Dale followed him, and found him there. Applying his great strength with almost superhuman energy to the door, it shut with a crash, and the communication between the buildings was cut off! Dale then seized Frank by the collar, and dragged him into the open air, when he himself almost sank to the ground. Fresh air, however, soon restored them both, and in a few minutes they were actively engaged at another part of the building.

Bravely and perseveringly though this was done, it availed not, for nothing could withstand the fury of the fire. The warehouse caught, and was soon a glowing mass like the others, while the flames raged with such violence that their roaring drowned the shouting of men, and the more distant roar of the innumerable multitude that densely covered London Bridge, and clustered on every eminence from which a safe view of the great fire could be obtained.

The floating fire-engines had now been at work for some time, and the men in charge of their branches were suffering greatly from the intense heat. About this time, nearly seven o'clock in the evening, Mr Braidwood went to these men to give them a word of encouragement. He proceeded down one of the approaches to the river from Tooley Street, and stopped when nearly half way to give some directions, when a sudden and tremendous explosion, took place, shaking the already tottering walls, which at this place were of great height. A cry was raised, "Run! the wall is falling!" Every one sprang away at the word. The wall bulged out at the same time; and one of the firemen, seeing that Mr Braidwood was in imminent danger, made a grasp at him as he was springing from the spot; but the heavy masses of brick-work dashed him away, and, in another moment, the gallant chief of the Fire Brigade lay buried under at least fifteen feet of burning ruin.

Any attempt at rescue would have been impossible as well as unavailing, for death must have been instantaneous. The hero's warfare with the flames, which had lasted for upwards of thirty-eight years, was ended; and his brave spirit returned to God Who gave it.

That a man of no ordinary note had fallen was proved, before many hours had passed, by the deep and earnest feeling of sorrow and sympathy which was manifested by all classes in London, from Queen Victoria downwards, as well as by the public funeral which took place a few days afterwards, at which were present the Duke of Sutherland, the Earl of Caithness, the Reverend Doctor Cumming, and many gentlemen connected with the insurance offices; the committee and men of the London Fire Brigade; also those of various private and local brigades; the secretary and conductors of the Royal Society for the Protection of Life from Fire; the mounted Metropolitan and City police; the London Rifle Brigade (of which Mr Braidwood's three sons were members); the superintendents and men of the various water companies; and a long string of private and mourning carriages: to witness the progress of which hundreds of thousands of people densely crowded the streets and clustered in the windows and on every available eminence along the route; while in Cheapside almost all the shops were shut and business was suspended; and in the neighbourhood of Shoreditch toiling thousands of artisans came forth from factory and workshop to "see the last of Braidwood," whose name had been so long familiar to them as a "household word." The whole heart of London seemed to

have been moved by one feeling, and the thousands who thronged the streets "had" (in the language of one of the papers of the day) "gathered together to witness the funeral, not of a dead monarch, not of a great warrior, not of a distinguished statesman, not even of a man famous in art, in literature, or in science, but simply of James Braidwood, late superintendent of the London Fire-Engine Establishment"—a true hero, and one who was said, by those who knew him best, to be an earnest Christian man.

But at the moment of his fall his men were engaged in the thick of battle. Crushing though the news of his death was, there was no breathing time to realise it.

The fierce heat had not only driven back the firemen on shore, but had compelled the floating fire-engines to haul off, in consequence of the flaming matter which poured over the wharf wall and covered the surface of the river the entire length of the burning warehouses; while the whole of the carriageway of Tooley Street was ankle deep in hot oil and tallow. After the fall of their Chief, Messrs Henderson and Fogo, two of the principal officers of the brigade, did their utmost to direct the energies of the men.

Night closed in, and the flames continued to rage in all their fury and magnificence. News of this great fire spread with the utmost rapidity over the metropolis. Indeed, it was visible at Hampstead while it was yet daylight. When darkness set in, one of the most extraordinary scenes that London ever produced was witnessed. From all quarters the people came pouring in, on foot, in omnibus, cab, pleasure-van, cart, and waggon—all converging to London Bridge. At nine o'clock the bridge and its approaches presented all the appearance of the Epsom Road on the Derby Day. Cabs and 'buses plied backwards and forwards on the bridge all night, carrying an unlimited number of passengers at 2 pence and 3 pence each, and thousands of persons spent the night in thus passing to and fro. The railway terminus, Billingsgate Market, the roof of the Coal Exchange, the Monument, the quays, the windows, the house-tops, the steeples, and the chimney-stalks—all were crowded with human beings, whose eager upturned faces were rendered intensely bright against the surrounding darkness by the fierce glare of the fire. But the Thames presented the most singular appearance of all—now reflecting on its bosom the inky black clouds of smoke; anon the red flames, as fresh fuel was licked up by the devouring element, and, occasionally, sheets of silver light that flashed through the chaos when sulphur

and saltpetre explosions occurred. Mountains of flame frequently burst away from the mass of burning buildings and floated upward for a few moments, and the tallow and tar which flowed out of the warehouses floated away blazing with the tide and set the shipping on fire, so that land and water alike seemed to be involved in one huge terrific conflagration.

The utmost consternation prevailed on board the numerous craft on the river in the vicinity of the fire, for thick showers of sparks and burning materials fell incessantly. Gusts of wind acted on the ruins now and then, and at such moments the gaunt walls, cracked and riven out of shape, stood up, glowing with intense white heat in the midst of a sea of fire from which red flames and dark clouds of smoke were vomited, as from the crater of some mighty volcano, with a roar that mingled with the shouts of excited thousands, and drowned even the dull incessant thumpings of the engines that worked in all directions.

Moored alongside of Chamberlain's Wharf was a small sloop. Little blue blisters of light broke out on her rigging; soon these increased in size, and in a few minutes she was on fire from stem to stern. Immediately after, there came a barge with flowing sails, borne on the rising tide. She passed too near to the conflagration. Her crew of three men became panic-stricken and lost control of her. At sight of this a great shout was raised, and a boat put off and rescued the crew; but almost before they were landed their barge was alight from stem to stern. The tremendous cheer that burst from the excited multitude at sight of this rescue rose for a moment above the roaring of the conflagration. Then another barge was set on fire by the blazing tallow which floated out to her, but she was saved by being scuttled.

In the midst of such a scene it was to be expected that there would be damage to life and limb. The firemen, besides being exposed to intense heat for hours, were almost blinded and choked by the smoke emitted from the burning pepper—more especially the cayenne—of which there was a large quantity in the warehouses. Some of the men who were working the engines fell into the river and were drowned. A gentleman who was assisting the firemen had his hand impaled on an iron spike. A poor Irishman had his neck broken by the chain of the floating-engine, and several of the police force and others were carried to hospital badly burned and otherwise injured.

Some of the casualties occurred in places where only a few persons were there to witness them, but others were enacted on the river, and on spots which were in full view of the vast multitudes on London Bridge. A boat containing five men put off to collect the tallow which floated on the water, but it got surrounded by tallow which had caught fire, and the whole of its occupants were either burned to death or drowned. Later in the night a small skiff rowed by a single man was drawn by the tide into the vortex of the fire. Another boat ran out and saved the man, but a second boat which was pulled off by a single rower for the same purpose was drawn too near the fire, and its brave occupant perished. So eager were the multitude on the bridge to witness these scenes that some of themselves were forced over the parapet into the river and drowned.

Comical incidents were strangely mingled with these awful scenes, although it is but justice to say the prevailing tone of the crowd was one of solemnity. Itinerant vendors of ginger-beer, fruit, cakes, and coffee ranged themselves along the pavements and carried on a brisk trade—especially after the public-houses were closed, many of which, however, taking advantage of the occasion, kept open door all night.

Among these last was the "Angel," belonging to Gorman.

That worthy was peculiarly active on this occasion. He never neglected an opportunity of turning an honest penny, and, accordingly, had been engaged from an early hour in his boat collecting tallow; of which plunder a considerable amount had been already conveyed to his abode.

Besides Gorman, several of the other personages of our tale found their way to the great centre of attraction, London Bridge, on that night. Among them was John Barret, who, on hearing of the fire, had left his snug little villa and pretty little wife to witness it.

He had already made one or two cheap trips on one of the omnibuses, and, about midnight, got down and forced his way to a position near the south side of the bridge. Here he was attracted to a ginger-beer barrow which an unusually adventurous man had pushed through the crowd into a sheltered corner. He forced his way to it, and, to his amazement, found the owner to be his former friend Ned Hooper.

"Hallo! Barret."

"Why, Ned!" were the exclamations that burst simultaneously from their lips.

"This is a strange occupation," said Barret with a smile.

"Ah, it may seem strange to you, no doubt, but it's familiar enough to me," replied Ned, with a grin.

The demand for beer was so great at this time that Ned could not continue the conversation.

"Here, boy," he said to an urchin who stood near, "you draw corks as fast as you can and pour out the beer, and I'll give you a copper or two and a swig into the bargain."

The boy accepted the post of salesman with alacrity, and Ned turned to his friend and seized his hand.

"Barret," said he, in a low, earnest voice, "if I succeed in holding out, I own my salvation, under God, to you. I've tasted nothing but ginger-beer for many a long day, and I really believe that I have got my enemy down at last. It's not a lucrative business, as you may see," he added with a sad smile, glancing at his threadbare garments, "nor a very aristocratic one."

"My dear Ned," cried Barret, interrupting, and suddenly thrusting his hand into his pocket.

"No, Barret, no," said Ned firmly, as he laid his hand on the other's, arm; "I don't want money; I've given up begging. You gave me your advice once, and I have taken that—it has been of more value to me than all the wealth that is being melted into thin air, John, by yonder fire—"

Ned was interrupted at this point by a burst of laughter from the crowd. The cause of their mirth was the appearance of a tall, thin, and very lugubrious-looking man who had come on the bridge to see the fire. He had got so excited that he had almost fallen over the parapet, and a policeman had kindly offered to escort him to a place of safety.

"Why, what d'ye mean?—what d'ye take me for?" cried the tall man angrily; "I'm an honest man; my name is David Boone; I've only come to see the fire; you've no occasion to lay hold o' *me*!"

"I know that," said the policeman; "I only want to get you out of danger. Come along now."

Just then a thickset man with a red handkerchief tied round his head came forward to the stall and demanded a glass of beer. The moment his eyes encountered those of Boone he became pale as death and staggered back as if he had received a deadly blow.

"Is that you, Gorman?" cried David, in a voice and with an expression of amazement.

Gorman did not reply, but gazed at his former friend with a look of intense horror, while his chest heaved and he breathed laboriously. Suddenly he uttered a loud cry and rushed towards the river.

Part of the crowd sprang after him, as if with a view to arrest him, or to see what he meant to do. In the rush Barret and Boone were carried away.

A few moments later a deep murmur of surprise rose from the thousands of spectators on the bridge, for a boat was seen to dash suddenly from the shore and sweep out on the river. It was propelled by a single rower—a man with a red kerchief tied round his head. The murmur of the crowd suddenly increased to a shout of alarm, for the man was rowing, his boat straight towards a mass of tallow which floated and burned on the water.

"Hold on!" "Lookout ahead!" shouted several voices, while others screamed "Too late!" "He's gone!" and then there arose a wild cry, for the man rowed straight into the centre of the burning mass and was enveloped in the flames. For one moment he was seen to rise and swing his arms in the air—then he fell backwards over the gunwale of his boat and disappeared in the blazing flood.

Fiercer and fiercer raged the fire. The night passed—the day came and went, and night again set in—yet still the flames leaped and roared in resistless fury, and still the firemen fought them valiantly. And thus they fought, day and night, hand to hand, for more than a

fortnight, before the battle was thoroughly ended and the victory gained.

How the firemen continued to do their desperate work, day and night, almost without rest, it is impossible to tell. Frank Willders said that, after the first night, he went about his work like a man in a dream. He scarcely knew when, or how, or where he rested or ate. He had an indistinct remembrance of one or two brief intervals of oblivion when he supposed he must have been asleep, but the only memory that remained strong and clear within him was that of constant, determined fighting with the flames. And Willie Willders followed him like his shadow! clad in a coat and helmet borrowed from a friend in the Salvage Corps. Willie fought in that great fight as if he had been a trained fireman.

On the fourth day, towards evening, Frank was ordered down into a cellar where some tar-barrels were burning. He seized the branch, and was about to leap down the stair when Dale stopped him.

"Fasten the rope to your belt," he said.

Frank obeyed without speaking and then sprang forward, while Dale himself followed, ordering Corney, Baxmore, and one or two others, to hold on to the ropes. Willie Willders also ran in, but was met by such a dense cloud of smoke that he was almost choked. Rushing back, he shouted, "Haul on the ropes!"

The men were already hauling them in, and in a few seconds Dale and Frank were dragged by their waist-belts into the open air, the former nearly, and the latter quite, insensible.

In a few minutes they both recovered, and another attempt was made to reach the fire in the cellar, but without success.

The public did not witness this incident. The firemen were almost surrounded by burning ruins, and none but comrades were there.

Indeed, the public seldom see the greatest dangers to which the fireman is exposed. It is not when he makes his appearance on some giddy height on a burning and tottering house, and is cheered enthusiastically by the crowd, that his courage is most severely tried. It is when he has to creep on hands and knees through dense smoke,

and hold the branch in the face of withering heat, while beams are cracking over his head, and burning rubbish is dropping around, and threatening to overwhelm him—it is in such circumstances, when the public know nothing of what is going on, and when no eye sees him save that of the solitary comrade who shares his toil and danger, that the fireman's nerve and endurance are tested to the uttermost.

After leaving the cellar, Dale and his men went to attempt to check the fire in a quarter where it threatened to spread, and render this—the greatest of modern conflagrations—equal to the great one of 1666.

"We might reach it from that window," said Dale to Frank, pointing to a house, the sides of which were already blistering, and the glass cracking with heat.

Frank seized the branch and gained the window in question, but could not do anything very effective from that point. He thought, however, that from a window in an adjoining store he might play directly on a house which was in imminent danger. But the only means of reaching it was by passing over a charred beam, thirty feet beneath which lay a mass of smouldering ruins. For one moment he hesitated, uncertain whether or not the beam would sustain his weight. But the point to be gained was one of great importance, so he stepped boldly forward, carrying the branch with him. As he advanced, the light of the fire fell brightly upon him, revealing his tall figure clearly to the crowd, which cheered him heartily.

At that moment the beam gave way. Willie, who was about to follow, had barely time to spring back and gain a firm footing, when he beheld his brother fall headlong into the smoking ruins below.

In another moment he had leaped down the staircase, and was at Frank's side. Baxmore, Dale, Corney, and others, followed, and, in the midst of fire and smoke, they raised their comrade in their arms and bore him to a place of safety.

No one spoke, but a stretcher was quickly brought, and Frank was conveyed in a state of insensibility to the nearest hospital, where his manly form—shattered, burned, and lacerated—was laid on a bed.

He breathed, although he was unconscious and evinced no sign of feeling when the surgeons examined his wounds.

A messenger was despatched for Mrs Willders, and Willie remained to watch beside him while his comrades went out to continue the fight.

Chapter Thirty Three.

The Last.

For many months Frank Willders lay upon his bed unable to move, and scarcely able to speak. His left leg and arm had been broken, his face and hands were burned and cut, and his once stalwart form was reduced to a mere wreck.

During that long and weary time of suffering he had two nurses who never left him—who relieved each other day and night; smoothed his pillow and read to him words of comfort from God's blessed book. These were, his own mother and Emma Ward.

For many weeks his life seemed to waver in the balance, but at last he began to mend. His frame, however, had been so shattered that the doctors held out little hope of his ever being anything better than a helpless cripple, so, one day, he said to Emma:

"I have been thinking, Emma, of our engagement." He paused and spoke sadly—as if with great difficulty.

"And I have made up my mind," he continued, "to release you."

"Frank!" exclaimed Emma.

"Yes, dear. No one can possibly understand what it costs me to say this, but it would be the worst kind of selfishness were I to ask you to marry a poor wretched cripple like me."

"But what if I refuse to be released, Frank?" said Emma, with a smile; "you may, indeed, be a cripple, but you shall not be a wretched one if it is in my power to make you happy; and as to your being poor—what of that? I knew you were not rich when I accepted you, and you know I have a very, very small fortune of my own which will at least enable us to exist until you are able to work again."

Frank looked at her in surprise, for he had not used the word *poor* with reference to money.

"Has mother, then, not told you anything about my circumstances of late?" he asked.

"No, nothing; what could she tell me that I do not already know?" said Emma.

Frank made no reply for a few moments, then he said with a sad yet gratified smile—

"So you refuse to be released?"

"Yes, Frank, unless you *insist* on it," replied Emma.

Again the invalid relapsed into silence and shut his eyes. Gradually he fell into a quiet slumber, from which, about two hours later, he awoke with a start under the impression that he had omitted to say something. Looking up he found that his mother had taken Emma's place. He at once asked why she had not told Emma about the change in his fortunes.

"Because I thought it best," said Mrs Willders, "to leave you to tell her yourself, Frank."

"Well, mother, I depute you to tell her now, and pray do it without delay. I offered to give her up a short time ago, but she refused to listen to me."

"I'm glad to hear it," replied the widow with a smile. "I always thought her a good, sensible girl."

"Hm! so did I," said Frank, "and something more."

Once again he became silent, and, as an inevitable consequence, fell fast asleep. In which satisfactory state we will leave him while we run briefly over the events of his subsequent history.

In direct opposition to the opinion of all his doctors, Frank not only recovered the use of all his limbs, but became as well and strong as ever—and the great fire in Tooley Street left no worse marks upon him than a few honourable scars.

His recovery, however, was tedious. The state of his health, coupled with the state of his fortune, rendered it advisable that he should seek the benefit of country air, so he resigned his situation in the London Fire Brigade—resigned it, we may add, with deep regret, for some of his happiest days had been spent in connection with that gallant corps.

Rambling and fishing among the glorious mountains of Wales with his brother Willie, he speedily regained health and strength. While wandering with delight through one of the most picturesque scenes of that wild and beautiful region, he came suddenly one day on a large white umbrella, under which sat a romantic-looking man, something between an Italian bandit and an English sportsman, who was deeply engrossed with a sheet of paper on which he was depicting one of the grandest views in the splendid pass of Llanberis. At this man Willie rushed with a shout of surprise, and found that he answered at once to the name of Fred Auberly! Fred was thrown into such a state of delight at the sight of his old friends that he capsized the white umbrella, packed up his paints, and accompanied them to their inn. Here, on being questioned, he related how that, while in Rome he had been seized with a fever which laid him prostrate for many weeks; that, on his recovery, he wrote to Loo and his father, but received no reply from either of them; that he afterwards spent some months in Switzerland, making more than enough of money with his brush to "keep the pot boiling," and that, finally, he returned home to find that dear Loo was dead, and that the great Tooley Street fire had swept away his father's premises and ruined him. As this blow had, however, been the means of softening his father, and effecting a reconciliation between them, he was rather glad than otherwise, he said, that the fire had taken place. Fred did not say—although he might have said it with truth—that stiff and stately Mr Auberly had been reduced almost to beggary, and that he was now dependent for a livelihood on the very palette and brushes which once he had so ruthlessly condemned to the flames!

After this trip to Wales, Frank returned home and told his mother abruptly that he meant to marry Emma Ward without delay, to which Mrs Willders replied that she thought he was quite right. As Emma appeared to be of the same mind the marriage took place in due course. That is to say, Miss Tippet and Emma managed to put it off as long as possible and to create as much delay as they could. When they had not the shadow of an excuse for further delay—not

so much as a forgotten band or an omitted hook of the voluminous trousseau—the great event was allowed to go on—or, "to come off."

Many and varied were the faces that appeared at the church on that auspicious occasion. Mr Auberly was there to give away the bride, and wonderfully cheerful he looked, too, considering that he gave her to the man whom he once thought so very unworthy of her. Willie was groomsman, of course, and among the bridesmaids there was a little graceful, dark-eyed and dark-haired creature, whom he regarded as an angel or a fairy, or something of that sort, and whom everybody else, except Frank and Mrs Willders, thought the most beautiful girl in the church. In the front gallery, just above this dark-eyed girl, sat an elderly man who gazed at her with an expression of intense affection. His countenance was careworn and, had a somewhat dissipated look upon it. Yet there was a healthy glow on it, too, as if the dissipation were a thing of the distant past. The dark-eyed girl once or twice stole a glance at the elderly man and smiled on him with a look of affection quite as fervent as his own. There was a rather stylish youth at this man's elbow whose muscles were so highly developed that they appeared about to burst his superfine black coat. He was observed to nod familiarly to the dark-eyed girl more than once, and appeared to be in a state of considerable excitement—ready, as it were, to throw a somersault over the gallery on the slightest provocation.

Of course, Miss Tippet was there in "*such* a love of a bonnet," looking the picture of happiness. So was Mr Tippet, beaming all over with joy. So was Miss Deemas, scowling hatred and defiance at the men. So was David Boone, whose circumstances had evidently improved, if one might judge from the self-satisfied expression of his face and the splendour of his attire. John Barret was also there, and, close beside him stood Ned Hooper, who appeared to shrink modestly from observation, owing, perhaps, to his coat being a little threadbare. But Ned had no occasion to be ashamed of himself, for his face and appearance showed clearly that he had indeed been enabled to resist temptation, and that he had risen to a higher position in the social scale than a vendor of ginger-beer.

In the background might have been seen Hopkins—tall and dignified as ever, with Matty Merryon at his side. It was rumoured "below-stairs" that these two were engaged, but as the engagement has not yet advanced to anything more satisfactory, *we* hold that to be a private matter with which we have no right to meddle.

Close to these stood a group of stalwart men in blue coats and leathern belts, and with sailor-like caps in their hands. These men appeared to take a lively interest in what was going forward, and evidently found it difficult to restrain a cheer when Frank took Emma's hand. Once or twice during the service one or two other men of similar appearance looked into the church as if in haste, nodded to their comrades, and went out again, while one of them appeared in the organ loft with a helmet hanging on his arm and his visage begrimed with charcoal, as if he were returning from a recent fire. This man, feeling, no doubt, that he was not very presentable, evidently wished to see without being seen. He was very tall and stout, and was overheard to observe, in very Irish tones, that "it was a purty sight intirely."

When the carriage afterwards started from the door, this man—who bore a strong resemblance to Joe Corney—sprang forward and called for three cheers, which call was responded to heartily by all, but especially by the blue-coated and belted fellows with sailor-like caps, who cheered their old comrade and his blooming bride with those deep and thrilling tones which can be produced in perfection only by the lungs and throats of true-blue British tars!

Now, it must not be supposed that this was the end of Frank's career. In truth, it was only the beginning of it, for Frank Willders was one of those men who know how to make a good use of money.

His first proceeding after the honeymoon was to take a small farm in the suburbs of London. He had a tendency for farming, and he resolved at least to play at it if he could make nothing by it. There was a small cottage on the farm, not far from the dwelling-house. This was rented by Willie, and into it he afterwards introduced Ziza Cattley as Mrs William Willders. The widow inhabited another small cottage not a hundred yards distant from it, but she saw little of her own home except at night, being constrained to spend most of her days with one or other of her "boys."

As the farm was near a railway station, Willie went to town every morning to business—Saturdays and Sundays excepted—and returned every evening. His business prospered and so did Mr Tippet's. That eccentric old gentleman had, like Mr Auberly, been ruined by the great fire, but he did not care—so he said—because the *other* business kept him going! He was not aware that Willie's engineering powers turned in all the money of that other business,

and Willie took care never to enlighten him, but helped him as of old in planning, inventing, and discovering, to the end of his days.

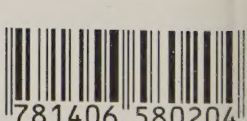
There was one grand feature which Frank introduced into his suburban establishment which we must not omit to mention. This was a new patent steam fire-engine. He got it not only for the protection of his own farm, but, being a philanthropic man, for the benefit of the surrounding district, and he trained the men of his farm and made them expert firemen. Willie was placed in command of this engine, so that the great wish of his early years was realised! There was not a fire within ten miles round them at which Willie's engine was not present; and the brothers continued for many years to fight the flames together in that neighbourhood.

As for stout George Dale, and sturdy Baxmore, and facetious Joe Corney, with his comrades Moxey, Williams, and Mason, and Sam Forest, those heroes continued to go on the even tenor of their way, fighting more battles with the flames in six months than were fought with our human enemies by all our redcoats and blue-jackets in as many years, and without making any fuss about it, too, although danger was the element in which they lived, and wounds or death might have met them any day of the year.

For all we know to the contrary, they may be carrying on the war while we pen this chronicle, and, unless more vigorous measures are adopted for *preventing* fire than have been taken in time past, there can be no question that these stout-hearted men will in time to come have more occasion than ever for—fighting the flames.

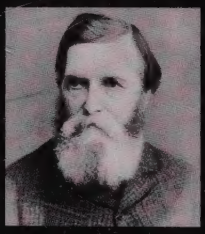
The End.

CPSIA information can be obtained at www.ICGtesting.com
Printed in the USA
242963LV00004B/14/A



Property
Of
Warren
County
PUBLIC
LIBRARY

R. M. Ballantyne (1825-1894) was a Scottish juvenile fiction writer. Born Robert Michael Ballantyne in Edinburgh, he was part of a famous family of printers and publishers. In 1848 he published his first book, *Hudson's Bay: or, Life in the Wilds of North America*. For some time he was employed by Messrs Constable, the publishers, but in 1856 he gave up business for the profession of literature, and began the series of adventure stories for the young with which his name is popularly associated. *The Young Fur-Traders* (1856), *The Coral Island* (1857), *The World of Ice* (1859), *Ungava: A Tale of Eskimo Land* (1857), *The Dog Crusoe* (1860), *The Lighthouse* (1865), *Deep Down, a Tale of the Cornish Mines* (1868), *The Pirate City* (1874), *Erling the Bold* (1869), *The Settler and the Savage* (1877), and other books, to the number of upwards of a hundred, followed in regular succession, his rule being in every case to write as far as possible from personal knowledge of the scenes he described.



www.dodopress.co.uk
dodo@dodopress.co.uk

Dodo Press specialises in the publication and distribution of rare and out-of-print books.

ISBN 978-1-4065-8020-4
90000
9 781406 580204